Socrates, Alcibiades, and Aspasia - Nicolas André Monsiaux (1754-1837)

Philosophy and “misinformation” go way back...

If everybody always lies to you, the consequence is not that you believe the lies,
but rather that nobody believes anything any longer.[1]

– Hannah Arendt

We want one single, grand lie, which will be believed by everybody –
including the rulers, ideally, but failing that, the rest of the city.

– Socrates in Plato’s *Republic*, Bk 3 (414b-c)

...many readers have become estranged from mainstream media, because they know that they are being tricked and deceived: they are aware that what they see on television or read in the papers is often an extension of what governments tell them.... To identify and expose these strategies of misleading manipulation is one of the crucial tasks of critical thought today. On it hinges the possibility for citizens to be more than just passive spectators of the spectacle of communication and

1. From a 1974 interview with the French writer Roger Errera.

defenceless targets of propaganda techniques. Only in such terms is the much needed process of improving the quality and reliability of public discourse conceivable.[2]

– Alessandro Prato

He that uses words without any clear and steady meaning, what does he but lead himself and others into errors? And he that designedly does it, ought to be looked on as an enemy to truth and knowledge…. First remedy: To use no word without an idea annexed to it. First, A man shall take care to use no word without a signification, no name without an idea for which he makes it stand.[3]

– John Locke

Cynicism is inductive. And toxic to trust. Trust is an essential element of social epistemology that allows communities to function. I defend cynicism as necessary to social health – think of it like an antibody in the immune system. You need the cynic to suss out and explode harmful travesties of trust, threats of which are ever present. But too much cynicism is an autoimmune social disorder. Thus, we mustn't tolerate conditions conducive to cynicism. The cynic is never wrong. The problem is tolerance for the conditions that make the cynic right.[4]

– Bianco Luno

Last October, when fear about Ebola was at its height in the US, we saw the phrase, "out of an abundance of caution" being used to justify just about anything under the sun. Want to ban kids from schools because they shared a continental land mass with Ebola victims? Go ahead and do it out of an abundance of caution. Want to confine anyone who gets sick on an airplane to the bathroom for a whole flight? Go ahead and do it out of an abundance of caution. In fact, out of an abundance of caution, we should really plan to never read anything online again, so that we can be sure that the phrase never takes hold in our brains.[5]

– Tara Kirk Sell and Crystal Boddie

...all the way to Socrates' trial, sentencing, and execution 2400 years ago. He was found guilty of "impiety" and "corrupting the young." Athenian society at the time was undergoing great stress. Socrates' behavior before and at the trial was disrespectful of the reasons widely held to be the cause of that stress. He dared to imply that sloppy thinking, not angered deities, was responsible for the perceived threats to society. Questioning standard pieties is likely anathema to social cohesion and community survival.[6] It is intolerable.

---

2. "The Abuse of Words: the Case of Euphemism," *American International Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 8, No. 3, September 2019.
3. *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690) Book III, Chapter X "Of the Abuse of Words" and Bk III, Ch XI, par 5 and 8, "Of the Remedies of the Foregoing Imperfections and Abuses of Words."
4. So, Diogenes of Sinope, the original cynic, a "Socrates gone mad," might have put it – were he a bit more hypotaxic than we have evidence that he was… according to Bianco Luno, from his forthcoming collection, *leçons en ténèbres*.
5. *Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security*, [2015!] Tara Kirk Sell and Crystal Boddie. See Appendix 1 below for the full article quoted.
6. "Socrates was guilty as charged. One of the most famous trials in history has been misrepresented as a miscarriage of justice, when it was really a legitimate case of democracy in action, a controversial new study claims," a description of *Ancient Greek Political Thought In Practice* by classicist Paul Cartledge, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Philosophy, again, is facing a frontal attack.[7] Since when can you do philosophy without *asking hard questions about ourselves*? And are there any questions that are off limits for philosophy? *No. None whatsoever.* If an authority insists that about *this or that* matter you may not ask questions and scrutinize proposed answers, those are precisely the questions that need to be asked and their possible answers *entertained* – not believed. Otherwise, you may as well be asking directions for the nearest restroom, a legitimate but not very philosophical question.

Are there situations where suppressing question-asking is rationally justifiable? Emergencies? An emergency is… what? A temporary state, *necessarily* so. A state to be avoided if possible and circumscribed as tightly as possible when it is too late to be avoided. Otherwise, a moratorium on inquiry plays into the hands of the cynic, who has seen this all before many times. Cynicism is a rational response to being taken for a fool. It may, in the end, be the most defensible attitude in assessing human conduct, but it is an attitude we should not rush to foster… at least for the sake of those who do not think cynicism describes the optimal epistemic attitude, which I take to be most readers.[8]

So why in a million years would anyone dream of being cynical given that, as Keats had it, life is "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever"?

Have – *are* we being misled?

Philosophers remark on several forms of deception. Each poses a different kind of epistemic challenge, a distinct affront to understanding:

1. The lie,
2. bullshit,[9]
3. and a late innovation, the characterization of an expression[10] as "misinformation."

The present claim is that the latter, the *calling out* of "misinformation," reduces to a charge that someone is lying or bullshitting, playing fast and lose with the truth – but with an added epistemic element. A charge of misinformation is a peculiarly *toxic* euphemism for lying or bullshitting. Its invocation is used to *forestall* inquiry. Forestalling inquiry is epistemically toxic. It is an abuse of euphemism.[11]

---

7. For example, Mill's case for the unfettered flow of information of *every and any* truth value – it is argued in this student paper, "Mill on Censorship of COVID-19 Misinformation" – was historically contingent. The internet has made it too easy for mis-, dis-, and malinformation to spread. Tech has given us special insight into whom to trust. Thus, apparently, free speech, as the morass through which we were once condemned to sift for constructive information, has become obsolete... Certainly, Mill's view generates problems (especially as he relies on the principle of *physical* harm as the only legitimate curb to expression), but we have yet to be presented with a case that there is a tech solution to the problems of trust or deference.
8. Excluding myself from among "most." I may not have much faith in humanity (a personal failing, perhaps) but I proceed on the assumption my reader has some.
9. See our topic "Trump: lies, fallacies, and bullshit."
10. Ideas, facts, considerations, theories, opinions, etc.
11. "The Abuse of Words: the Case of Euphemism," Alessandro Prato. *American International Journal of Social Science* Vol. 8, No. 3, September 2019. See also how euphemism transforms into dysphemism through a process of pejoration.

The lie does the deception thing straightforwardly. The liar *cares* enough about the truth to want you *not* to know it.

The bullshitter could not care less about truth; the bullshitter's goal is not strictly to inform or deceive but to *manipulate* thought or action. The bullshitter is epistemically indifferent. A bullshitter may even convey the truth, but, for them, that's not the point of the speech act.

The point of a "misinformation" claim, in fashionable usage, is shutting down inquiry. This goes beyond the bullshitter's indifference or the liar's (in principle) correctable project. The misinformation claimant is not sufficiently forthright to call out a lie for what it is *and* embrace the burden of making the charge credible. Unlike the bullshitter, who is likely philosophically vacant, the misinformationist definitely has a specific *epistemic* agenda, a definite attitude toward knowledge acquisition. A lie misdirects. Bullshit distracts. Misinformation seeks to shut inquiry down.

The misinformation claimant, who we will call the "misinformationist," is more closely related to the bullshitter than the liar. Like the bullshitter, the misinformationist is *primarily* interested in manipulating thought and behavior, not in enhancing/diminishing anyone's epistemic state.[12]

Euphemism

An alternative interpretation of the misinformationist's act might be that it is a *civil* accusation of willful or irresponsible deception, a way of "gently" informing someone they are a liar. The gentleness consists in intimating inadvertent error, a momentary lapse of judgment. When is this an abuse of socially excusable euphemism?

Defensible euphemism is not a ploy to prevent epistemic enhancement. It is a *momentary* concession to the fact that we are not always capable of handling the truth, that, as humans, we are not always up to it. It is a way of acknowledging that we owe respect to someone's pain, stress, misfortune or grief. Bad things happen to people and we have moral obligations to not add insult to their injury. But this is a limited defense. The appropriate space for euphemism rapidly shrinks when dignitary or material harm is a consequence.

Euphemism can be ethically excused as a way to soften emotionally loaded expression in the interest of redirecting energy toward productive thinking on the assumption that *no one is being fooled* by the euphemism. It is an expression of fellow-feeling. That's all it is. Saying that someone has "passed away" instead of saying they are "dead" or have "kicked the bucket" does not deprive or seek to deprive the hearer of information. A speech act, coupled with measures to do just that – deprive of information – does. There is a limit to civility or politeness. This in why misinformationism is not excusable as socially-motivated euphemism.

Misinformationism, as we will use the term here, is the toxic use of euphemism for the purpose of forestalling epistemic enhancement. It is about promoting ignorance in the interest of some non-epistemic end. Can ignorance-preservation or ignorance-promotion (agnotology) be justified on moral grounds? If so, epistemic and ethical ends may come apart. Can they stand to stay apart for long?…

12. *Extra*-rational manipulation, arguably, is a *prima facie* ethical violation on both consequentialist and deontological grounds for reasons similar to those that impugn bullshitting. Deontologically, it stays unvindicated. Consequentially, it depends.

Athens was in decline at the time of Socrates' trial in 399 BCE. It never recovered its cultural status.

Emergencies and rights

Can emergencies excuse lies, bullshit, and misinformation – even mass human experimentation?

Maybe…

But the condition *must be an emergency*. Such conditions cannot be tolerated indefinitely or without an exit plan – on the assumption that "democratic" sensibilities remain operative. When the dire period is exceeded, the act becomes vicious, i.e., a vice. This happens when misinformationist claims are accompanied by *action* to impede, obscure, or harass access to potentially revelatory information; always *potentially* – because no information is immune to being false. No *human* source is sufficiently validated to dispense *only* accurate information. *This applies even to the "information" that the situation is, indeed, an "emergency."* The purpose of *declaring* an emergency is to get *passed* it, not to announce an opportunity for those positioned to exploit it. Any such declaration must be comfortable with the tension of being the object of suspicion. *Suppressing cause for suspicion is cause for suspicion.*

Again, on the assumption that *democratic* sensibilities are at all relevant. Perhaps they aren't? If so, we need explicit acknowledgment… so that a *different* discussion can be framed. To the best of my discernment, those sensibilities remain in the air in the cultural climate in which the term *mis*information (and its *dis*- and *mal*- variations) are used – even if this is not always made clear.

Why? What is the relationship between democratic ideas and the notions of rights?

The idea that the governed have *rights* falls out of the democratic pretension. The notion of "rights" was a brainchild of some Enlightenment philosophers (Locke, Rousseau, Kant...). It arose from the thought that, as rationally-capable agents, our interests must be respected because we are cosmically special. At least early in the career of the notion, no other animal, vegetable, or mineral was deemed entitled to the privilege of having a say in their fate. Not all thinkers concurred in this "specialness." Machiavelli, Bentham, and Marx, in different ways, didn't. Bentham famously called the notion of rights "nonsense on stilts." Sentience mattered – brainchildren, not so much. Marx thought larger social units and forces than individual humans and their interests are the source of the values that determine social and political dynamics. But in the post-Enlightenment, Western tradition, the "rights" notion took, big time. Now, even robots are threatening to acquire them.

Tied to the notion of rights are the *duties* to respect them. Governing bodies are bound by these duties *because* they are commonly *empowered* to violate them. (You don't accrue obligations to avoid violating principles you are not in a position to violate.)

There is a view that, *in an emergency*, it may be necessary for governing bodies to curtail rights. To "derogate" is to suspend or suppress a law – or, in this case, a "right" – in special circumstances. This derogation-friendly caveat has stirred much controversy in political and legal theory as well as moral

philosophy. We focus on a recent discussion by human rights law experts, Evan J. Criddle and Evan Fox-Decent.[13] They ask,

"In what sense are human rights rights if they are subject to derogation during emergencies?"

Opposed to the derogation-friendly view is the view that human rights are inviolable – *nothing* excuses their violation. This uncompromising view is related to the Kantian moral understanding behind a maxim such as that *nothing excuses a lie* because it is fundamentally a violation of the dignity attributable to being the exceptional kind of entity *capable* of being autonomous and accountable. It violates the respect we owe creatures with such dignity because only by having accurate information can a rationally-capable being exercise self-governance. What thwarts such exercise in irredeemably immoral, Kant insisted. Humans are such creatures, not this or that human, but humans as a class. For a state or state-like "power concentration" to neglect proper respect for this dignity is a human rights violation.

The derogation-friendly view is clearly not moved by the heterocosmic appeal of Kantian principles. Collective and material goals may pre-empt the *nicety* of a "a human right." If such notions have validity, it is instrumental to the larger goal of the material survival or flourishing of the community or species. A threat to these grander ends will legitimate derogation. Nothing of *ultimate* value is being violated by *instances* of derogation. Perhaps *systematic* derogation might be instrumentally unwise, but that would have to be shown, not assumed. It can't be a starting assumption as it is for Kant.

Can we have our rights – and have them violated, too?

Criddle and Fox-Decent defend what they call "fiduciary theory" which attempts a conceptual middle ground between the derogation and the violation of a "right." I suspect the theory accords with mainstream opinion on the matter. In outline, it goes like this:

Fiduciary theory seems to acknowledge a Kantian heterocosmic imperative to respect the dignity of the rationally-capable. But the rationally-capable *individual* may also *rationally* contract out the protection of their rights as one among others living in a community to a larger abstract entity such as a state – a "state" can be seen as an entity created expressly for mediating rights between parties having these. This works in a manner similar to the way you might entrust your health care to a doctor, your legal interests to lawyer, or your plugged toilet to a plumber. For the abstract or corporate entity's governance, derivative as it may be, to be effective, it may also require to be conferred *a dignity all its own*. We can conceive it as like a vessel of collectively conferred, proprietary dignity: it may contain quantitatively *more* dignity, *more* cause for respect, hence, *more* authority to govern than any single agent among the governed. Its collective authority may rationally and legitimately *override* that of any one among the governed – or even any subset of the governed smaller than the whole class of the governed. In this way, we may preserve the sanctity of a "right," however concocted, while permitting its violation when it conflicts with the collective and *more significant* right of the larger class or effective state.

From this we gather: not all rights are equal, and rights-violations may come *in degrees*, and abstract entities, too, can bear rights. You may have a right to this or that, but a government may have a *bigger* right to rule over and dispose of your right to this or that. Emergencies, determined by the bearer of the

13. "Human Rights, Emergencies, and the Rule of Law," *Human Rights Quarterly* 34 (2012) 39–87.

right to *determine* emergencies, may legitimate the violation of any individual's right to protect the stronger rights borne by a state or state-like entity – *also* the bearer of the right to designate emergencies.

Hence, you still have rights. Just don't let a designated collective "emergency" get between you and respect for them…

Fiduciary theory's reconciliation of a "sense of a right" with its legitimate violation recalls Bentham's quip. Perhaps the concept of a "right" plays a role in the manipulation of *consent* to violation, a psychological tool in the management of crowds, but little beyond that. What happens[14] whenever the idea of "rights" is confronted with authority is a *quid pro quo* in which the party empowered to drive the harder bargain gets more quid. The rest is as Bentham had it.

Epistemic bubbles and echo chambers

Both are enclosures to keep some ideas inside and other ideas out. But the concepts are different, according to Neil Levy,[15] and importantly so. An *epistemic bubble* describes a simple windowless social enclosure for information. If the epistemic quarantine is successful, no new information enters, and it is, as far as knowledge is concerned, developmentally static. If the quarantine fails, it may be traumatic for those comfortably ensconced within the enclosure when and if the enclosure fails. The bubble is vulnerable to popping out of the blue.

An *echo chamber* is different. Two kinds of ideas bounce around inside this kind of epistemic social chamber. Those from trusted insider sources and those from outside. At the first we nod our heads; the other we view with suspicion. But "to view with suspicion" implies it is *viewed.* The chamber has windows and they are being used to look out of. It happens that sometimes when you look out of a window you see interesting things. Sometimes those *outsider* things get your attention because you were not expecting them, especially when these things corroborate your *insider* convictions. Oddly, corroborative sources from outside the chamber are given more weight than insider ones *precisely* because they are from outside. When friends of your enemy say something you can agree with, it gets your attention better than when your trusted friends say the same thing.[16] Ideas from inside, while bearing a stamp of approval, lack *as much* corroborative power. We may agree with our fellow insider, but, precisely because they are an insider, we don't expect surprises from them. We already know what they are going to say, and that is a strike against their persuasive force. As sources of *new* information, they are epistemically ho-hum. Remaining curious is still acceptable within an echo chamber.

Openness to looking out of windows and *at least considering* what you see there exposes you to perspectives and other narratives different than the ones endemic to your chamber. Some space is cleared here for epistemic progress. It is not a question of when your *bubble* will break but of how

14. I don't say "*should* happen." But that the ideal is being used to manipulate. The opprobrium in the idea of "manipulation" is properly placed, the tension caused necessary.
15. "Echoes of covid misinformation," Neil Levy, *Philosophical Psychology*, 2021.
16. Consider pundits like Bret and Heather Weinstein or Russell Brand. They were, and have never stopped being, left-leaning in their politics (by classical Liberal understandings of what it means to be left: to be partial to the oppressed, marginalized, less powerful *and* suspicious of concentrations of power that would exploit power imbalances). They are increasingly being cited by right-wing media to support a case against epistemic excesses of "wokism."

development is possible as foreign ideas leak their way into your *chamber*. The boundaries of the epistemic enclosure are more likely to dissolve partially or become permeable.[17] Such hope is possible inside an echo chamber.

The assumption that what lies outside our echo chamber is deception, bullshit, or one of the varieties of misinformation, causes us *rightful* skepticism. It causes us to research and scrutinize outsider ideas, compare and contrast them with familiar indigenous counterparts, and, yes, it may spur doubt about even our insider views *because* we are *actively defending* them. You are being defensive when you are *compelled* to justify your views to yourself and others. You cannot defend what you cannot doubt. This compulsion is the mark of epistemic health. Finding independent *outsider* corroboration for your views is one of the most effective ways to defend your views. The *passive complacency* of a bubble-resident, in contrast, can only experience epistemic trauma when reality pokes their bubble, if ever that happens (the bubble-resident may go to their grave before). An untoward "truth sandwich" might intervene. But the bubble-resident is not in a position to see this coming. The more vigilant chamber-resident wants to see what's coming before it gets its foot in the door.

Echo chambers stand a chance in the epistemic war against ignorance and stupidity (i.e., *willful* ignorance). A "bubble" cannot survive the slightest perforation. While a "chamber" may have fully operable windows, hence, opportunities to observe and evaluate what gets in.

The echo chamber notion acknowledges that most of us cannot thrive as truly free-range or independent epistemic agents. We need a circle of certainty enabling us to carry on with non-epistemic activity. We need a *working* set of hallowed beliefs to revere as "true."[18] The echo chamber may privilege insider ideas but is not hermetically sealed against outsider ones. An echo chamber is not stable but neither is it as liable to lose its integrity suddenly.

To the extent that misinformation seeks to seal those windows, by boarding them up, to that extent it promotes the unstable trauma-begging of an epistemic bubble. Revolutions, potentially violent ones, are seeded in this way.

Meta-misinformation

To pile on prefixes, this is misinformation about misinformation.

17. Though not likely to disappear. Free-ranging *epistemism*, the idea that knowledge should never, under *any* circumstances, be impeded, though intelligible as an epistemic imperative, like its Kantian moral counterpart, is hyperbolic. Levy seems to presume this. This acknowledgment, which is at the root of deep epistemic cynicism, does not concern us here. (It will later.) We assume the reader is sufficiently invested in functional social reality to accept that the "echo chamber" idea, as a description of the situation, to be as good as it is ever likely to get.
18. This may be a psychological fact, and, as such, variable from person to person. Feature or flaw? Levy seems to take for granted the former.

Covid responses and the illusion of "evidence based" medicine, or "what's science got to do with it?"

> The advent of evidence based medicine was a paradigm shift intended to provide a solid scientific foundation for medicine. The validity of this new paradigm, however, depends on reliable data from clinical trials, most of which are conducted by the pharmaceutical industry and reported in the names of senior academics. The release into the public domain of previously confidential pharmaceutical industry documents has given the medical community valuable insight into the degree to which industry sponsored clinical trials are misrepresented.[1234] Until this problem is corrected, evidence based medicine will remain an illusion.[19]
>
> – Jon Jureidini, Robinson Research Institute, University of Adelaide and Leemon B. McHenry, California State University, Northridge, *BMJ*, 16 March 2022

The pandemic is being supplanted by the war in Ukraine as the latest emergency conducive to misinformation talk. The dust is far from settled but it will be viewed by historians, I think, as the Age of Endarkenment – a time when, though brewing for a long time, the elevation of *resilience* in the face of the harm in truth-seeking is no more, as it has in the past, a concession to our weakness but a point of pride. Among many Covid-related misinformation magnets,[20] I pick these few for illustration:

1. Ivermectin

The infamous iDrug has been at the center of great and undying controversy as a possible treatment of Covid-19 infection. A study published in *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM), on 31 March 2022, titled "Effect of Early Treatment with Ivermectin among Patients with Covid-19" on the effectiveness of Ivermectin is cited by many sources[21] in the popular press. The study concludes:

> Treatment with Ivermectin did not result in a lower incidence of medical admission to a hospital due to progression of Covid-19 or of prolonged emergency department observation among outpatients with an early diagnosis of Covid-19. (Funded by FastGrants and the Rainwater Charitable Foundation...)

Almost at the same time, in late March 2022, a peer-reviewed opinion piece "The illusion of evidence based medicine" was published in the *British Journal of Medicine* (BMJ), detailing what is wrong with much that has passed recently for "evidence-based" medical research and publication. Drs. Mobeen

---

19. "The illusion of evidence based medicine: Evidence based medicine has been corrupted by corporate interests, failed regulation, and commercialisation of academia, argue these authors,"Jon Jureidini, Robinson Research Institute, University of Adelaide and Leemon B. McHenry, California State University, Northridge. *BMJ (British Medical Journal)*, Published: 16 March 2022. See also "Drugs, money and misleading evidence," a review of the BMJ article authors' book of the same title, *Nature* 29 June 2020.

20. *Non*-Covid instances of MDM storms include the Hunter Biden affair, suppression of charges of NATO encroachment as contributory to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, absent penal comeuppance in the wake of the post-2008 financial crisis, WMD and Iraq... What differentiates these from foreign-based MDM campaigns such as Russia's interference in Trump's election campaigns is that the MDM charges in question target first and foremost *domestic* voices. You cannot lend credence to any suggestion that we, *ourselves*, through our "elected" leaders, might have done serious self-harm without being seen as affiliated with a foreign interest. You cannot criticize your own where it hurts. That is not permitted. The damage to "social cohesion" is intolerable. This is the problem we address here.

21. Such as this, this, and this. Although alternative views are accessible at venues such as Odysee, many discussions of Ivermectin have fallen afoul of Google's official policy on misinformation.

Sayed (U.S.) and John Campbell (U.K.) have gone through the BMJ piece carefully and comment. The NEJM and the BMJ are top medical journals, so what they publish carries a lot of credibility.

It seems the NEJM article illustrates a lot of the problems the BMJ piece indicates. It has been picked apart repeatedly. Below I offer my own observations made before reading any other analyses. Please see the Campbell or Sayed discussions or read the BMJ article (it is short and to the point) to see why one might focus on the points I do below. Among the concerns expressed in the BMJ piece which afflict the NEJM study are these:

1. The participants in the study

> On presentation to one of the trial outpatient care clinics, potential participants were screened to identify those meeting the eligibility criteria. Inclusion criteria were an age of 18 years or older; presentation to an outpatient care setting with an acute clinical condition consistent with Covid-19 within 7 days after symptom onset; and at least one high-risk criterion for progression of Covid-19, including an age of 50 years or older, diabetes mellitus, hypertension leading to the use of medication, cardiovascular disease, lung disease, smoking, obesity..., organ transplantation, chronic kidney disease (stage IV) or receipt of dialysis, immunosuppressive therapy..., a diagnosis of cancer within the previous 6 months, or receipt of chemotherapy for cancer. Patients who had been vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2 were eligible for participation in the trial.

These people were already symptomatically sick with covid and laced with comorbidities.

2. Date and dose

The study was carried out between "March 23, 2021, and August 6, 2021" – *before* extensive clinical experience, for example, by the FLCCC, had settled on an effective dose for Ivermectin of *0.6 mg/kg* of body weight. The study used instead: 400 µg/kg micrograms/kilogram, or *0.4 mg/kg* and on an *empty stomach*. A third less than the 0.6 mg/kg *with food* recommended by the FLCCC.

3. Funding

"Fast Grants" was the main "non-profit" funder of the NEJM study. They are:

> The grants are currently supported by: Arnold Ventures, The Audacious Project, The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, John Collison, Patrick Collison, Crankstart, Jack Dorsey, Kim and Scott Farquhar, Paul Graham, Reid Hoffman, Fiona McKean and Tobias Lütke, Yuri and Julia Milner, Elon Musk, Chris and Crystal Sacca, Schmidt Futures, and others. AWS has contributed compute credits.

Who are these people?

- Chan Zuckerberg - Facebook-affiliated. Chan is Zuckerberg's wife.
- Elon Musk - we know who he is...

- Arnold Ventures - John and Laura Arnold - billionaires
- The Audacious Project – more of the same people
- John Collison and Patrick Collison – Irish tech billionaires
- Crankstart – billionaire investors
- Jack Dorsey - former Twitter CEO.
- Kim and Scott Farquhar – Australian tech billionaires
- Paul Graham – programmer, investor
- Reid Hoffman – billionaire founder of Linked-in
- Fiona McKean and Tobias Lütke – billionaires, Tobias founded Shopify.
- Yuri and Julia Milner – billionaire Russian-Israeli investors
- Chris and Crystal Sacca – billionaire investors
- Schmidt Futures – tech billionaire investors

Why are *these* people funding *this* research? The short answer is because they have the money. A more complete answer is because no one else does. Apparently not government, not academia, not any other disinterested party. Are these people disinterested? The obvious: one never *becomes* a billionaire by giving away money; less obvious: but, once you are, doing so strategically helps with *staying* one. Investors invest in things. Successful ones invest in money-making ventures. It helps to know which these are by being involved in their management. These people are not bystanders to profit. They are involved.

On the interconnectedness of Pfizer, Facebook, and the Gates Foundation[22]:

> According to the National Pulse, Dr. Susan Desmond-Hellmann, who is a part of Pfizer's Board of Directors, served as the director of Facebook Inc. from 2013 to 2019. She was also the former CEO of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation from 2014 until 2020 and now serves as a senior advisor and board member of the Bill & Melinda Gates Medical Research Institute.[23]

Facebook and Twitter have been busy safeguarding the epistemic space for the masses for awhile. Many of the same names appear on supporter and founder lists of many non-profits. By this point, it has dawned on them that to be too obviously financially connected with both media or social media platforms and a profitable industry (like the pharmaceutical one is), at the moment, can appear unseemly. Hence, there is a role for the meta-nonprofit concept: moreover, "Fast Grants," a meta-nonprofit – a non-profit comprised of non-profits – can magnify charity. These bastions of disinterested corporate empathy can effectively channel funds where they are most needed to serve the public good. This is how it works. Elected governments, regulatory agencies, universities… do not generate their own resources. They don't know how anymore, if they ever did. Best leave this to those who have shown they know how.

Medical expertise, science-based medicine, evidence-driven research… all these notions presume that people really want to understand what is good for them and are willing to make the necessary adjustments and material sacrifices. But this is mistake. People want pills and jabs – not tasteless diets, muscle aches, nor anything that may give pause to their mortality denialism. And if the pills are too old,

22. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was set up of the pioneering "shell" tech non-profits, closely related "effective altruism." The concept of giving away money to get richer is Nobel-level genius.
23. The National Pulse and Wikipedia. (Wikipedia, too, by the way, has become another PR arm of the tech non-profits.)

or the jabs too few, to generate the funds to make newer and better pills and jabs, where is the sense in that? Where there is demand, the astute will position themselves to supply it.

Bottom line: these people know what is good for us. We don't. All else in misinformation.

4. The data from the NEJM study in context

> 100 patients (14.7%) in the Ivermectin group had a primary-outcome event (composite of hospitalization due to the progression of Covid-19 or an emergency department visit of >6 hours that was due to clinical worsening of Covid-19), as compared with 111 (16.3%) in the placebo group.

From which the study concludes:

> The probability that the percentage of patients with a primary-outcome event was lower in the Ivermectin group than in the placebo group did not meet the prespecified threshold for superiority in any of these three trial populations.

That is indeed a small effect. 100 in the Ivermectin versus 111 in the control group ended up with a "hospital event." But recall the selected participants were already sick with symptoms and comorbidities. No advocate of Ivermectin claims the "horse medicine" will raise the dead. Ivermectin is part of a protocol and not recommended *in isolation* to treat very sick or hospital-bound patients. No other drug is either.

Still, even at a *less* than optimal dose and among the *very* vulnerable, the study's own numbers showed *some* effect. If the numbers had been reversed, the conclusion of the NEJM study might have been served better. As it is, their data shows, under pretty adverse conditions, there is just a *hint* of benefit. It would be more confidence-inspiring to subject the iDrug's *competition* to similar challenges to see if these can salvage the already morbid better.

5. The NEJM study was *not* double blind.

The FLCCC is a coalition medical professionals focuses on clinical care, not laboratory science. See their response to the NEJM study. For comparison, see this much smaller, but *double-blinded*, RCT study, published earlier; it was not funded by governments or "non-profit" tax-haven hobbies of the wealthy (*objectively* disconnected from the financial consequences of the studies they fund). Its results for Ivermectin efficacy were positive but it was a much smaller study – of course, because without deep-pocketed funding this is the best that is often possible. Blind, randomized, placebo-controlled, trial studies, done right, are extremely expensive. Smaller studies are not as corroborative as larger ones. However, this one was doubleblinded and the NEJM one, though desirably larger, was not. Assuming the Blind-RCT is a gold standard in biomedical science, the blindedness helps to compensate for the deficiencies of its smaller size.

Who funds clinical care medicine? You do. Either directly or from your insurance premiums. Expensive as this is in countries like the U.S., at least you don't (yet) have to be a billionaire to get some.

Who funds pharmaceutical research? You do. Facilitated by billionaire investors via *meta-non-profits*, not least among them governments (yes, governments, even transnational organizations, are included in the definition of a "meta-non-profit") who collect and divert your taxes to this end. The best thing about this is that such pharmaceutical products as vaccines, if your government has access to the wherewithal, can be ostensibly "free" to you. You can not only get cured but be part of the cure, that is, participate, at your own indirect expense, in the research project. You are an "investor," too, don't forget. You invest the only thing of relative value you have: your bit of money but, mainly, your health.

Money drives both, but the difference between the clinical and the laboratory environments is the abstraction. You can sometimes look your doctor in the eye.

Conclusion:

Nothing *yet* has been settled regarding the helpfulness of Ivermectin-administration at any stage of the disease course. No responsible party is touting Ivermectin as a sure cure for the already infected with Covid-19, certainly not those with the comorbidities described in the NEJM study. There is *some* evidence in conjunction with a battery of other treatments, as suggested by the FLCCC protocols that it helps with recovery *at least as* well as more expensive, experimental – and profitable – drugs in *clinical* experience. Its apparent success in countries too poor to afford those drugs suggest as much.

More well-established is its usefulness as a *prophylactic* or in *very early* treatment at a proper dose.[24]

Still, nothing beats good nutrition, exercise, and healthy lifestyle habits at minimizing bad outcomes of Covid or most other disease conditions, according to any responsible health practitioner. Dr. Keith Moran, a much-respected Canadian clinician and medical educator, for one, makes it his mantra. He, along with John Ioannidis, one of the most influential medical researchers in the world, agree Ivermectin as a Covid treatment is too lacking in "evidence-based" corroboration, by which they mean *multiple*, *large*, and *blinded* RCTs. There's nothing radical or unreasonable about their cautious reticence. But they *consistently* express similar skepticism about mask-wearing (Moran, see below) and experimental and profitable drugs that *are* being approved and recommended with *no better evidence* than what we see in the NEJM study, *if not far worse*. The science just isn't there for recommendations of *general* mask-wearing or *general* vaccination (though these two doctors themselves are vaccinated, as indeed are previously cited Ivermectin apologists, Drs. Sayed and Campbell: judgments of vaccine appropriateness are not all-or-nothing, but they all oppose mandates). Ivermectin, perhaps through the accident of its availability and affordability, has a claim to be *as helpful* in *observational* studies as any more expensive treatments to date – in conjunction, of course, with supporting protocols. This has been suppressed in popular media.

The March 2022 NEJM Ivermectin study targeted the sick and comorbid, inadequately dosed and administered the drug, was funded by less than disinterested parties, glossed over despite these handicaps mild positive effect, and was not blinded.

When the medical history/hysteria of respiratory diseases of these times is finally documented, Ivermectin *may* indeed turn out to have been as effective as any pharmaceutical intervention, thus far,

24. There are metanalyses that go both ways and endless charges and counter charges of interestedness and "non-science." It should *all* be grist for our epistemic mill.

has been against Covid-19 – *in isolation.* That is to say, *not very*. It does not make you younger and it does not treat comorbidities. Most intriguing will be the revelation of the reasons given for spending so much money to discredit it. Is it that the drug itself is dangerous and its use, therefore, to be discouraged? There is plenty of evidence that it ranks as one of the most benign drugs ever developed, effective or not. Is it that it distracts from treatments, such as vaccines, that clearly protect others by reducing transmission? Now that variants of the virus are becoming endemic, how can we say that *any* pharmaceutical intervention has reduced transmission?

If only some entity with no clear vested interest would pay to put Ivermectin head to head in a blinded RCT trial with a patented antiviral drug such as molnupiravir or Paxlovid... But that is not likely to happen. It is too risky, mainly to shareholders. And, until this happens, the controversy will not go away. Clinical physicians are seeing that it helps in their practice. Governments, drug companies, and academic researchers, saturated in vested-interests, traceable to those profiting from certain outcomes, are not "motivated" to see any such effort.

To suggest such things has, and is, frequently cited as misinformation.

From Meetup.com guidelines – the first two items I think I'm ok by. The third gives me pause since philosophers are bound to quibble with any claim of scientific "proof" or "disproof."

✘ Harmful misinformation

Groups must not contain content or promote events that contain misinformation. This includes medical misinformation such as:

- Assurances of health cures or mental cures
- Unrealistic health, diet, and weight loss claims
- Claims that have been scientifically disproven and that may pose a public or personal health risk

2. Masks: "hygiene theatre"

There is precious little hard science for the use of masks for reducing Covid transmission in the general population. By "hard science" is meant studies measured against the so-called "gold standard" of randomized controlled trials.[25]

What there is suggesting benefit addresses *different* kinds of masks than those in common use, worn for very limited periods not exceeding *two hours*, in *hospital* settings, by personnel *trained* in their use, and *not* for preventing airborne *viral* infections. Breathing, last we heard, is essential for life forms like ours. Any intervention that chronically and systematically interferes with it, it would seem, ought to be examined with the utmost care.

Cloth masks are ineffective. Surgical masks marginally effective, maybe. Even N-95 masks have not been shown to be effective at what they have been *marketed* to the public as being effective for *when not worn correctly which few know how or dare[26] to do:* there is a right way to place a mask on your

25. "Irresistible hygiene theatre: Were masks a waste of time? Experts advocated an intervention they once thought useless," Geoff Shullenberger, *Unherd.*

26. In the back of their minds, it must occur to the bulk of mask-wearers that the *chronic* use of masks cannot be salutary. They cut themselves slack by wearing them badly. Deeply unsure if it is the right thing to do, they are half-assed about it.

face and to remove it; the extant (pre-Covid) science suggests masks have a “face-life” measured in 120 minutes beyond which the *same* mask should not be worn, along with “breath-catching” spells between masked events when no mask should be worn at all. Remember: *the more helpful a mask is at impeding anything microbial – especially of the* viral *sort, the more it restricts breathing.* Otherwise, we would have evolved physiological filtering mechanisms. In fact, we have and they are very effective. They are built into our air passages. But evolution has never been *just* about us. Other organisms, besides us, also do the evolution thing as they take their toll on their living environment, just as we do. We can fight back, but there are better ways than masks. More importantly, the vast majority of the microbes in our environment are not only not out to make us ill or kill us, they are “our friends,” their survival depends on ours; they are essential and beneficial to our health. Masks do not discriminate between the friendly and the harmful if in fact they do much discriminating at all. To the extent masks are effective, they may harm as much as benefit. Therefore, their *general or indiscriminate* use is unwise – if not worse, still another layer of collective self-harm, as though the life-styles that make for vulnerability were not enough.

Even in highly sanitized hospital settings, the air teems with potential microbial pathogens which cause illnesses endemic to those settings known as *nosocomial* infections. Suppose we were to attempt to make *all* human settings into hospital settings. Those settings *concentrate* microbes. What does a mask do? In theory, it keeps microbes on one side of the mask from the other side. On *which* side are the bad ones? Meanwhile we need to ventilate. Open windows, but keep the masks on. How is this suppose to be rational, let alone healthy?

Arguments that, even if the prophylactic effect of masks is small and spotty, it is a minor inconvenience that surely does little harm and potentially benefits us are inconsistent with other “enlightened” programs in which we are also adjured to individually accept small inconveniences in the interest of large global effects. Even leaving our obsessions with environmental prophylaxis aside, there is the environment itself. Since when have we stopped caring about it? (On the assumption we ever did.)

The masks made of materials such cloth we summarily dismissed as ineffective at least had the virtue of being biodegradable. If the purpose of masks was always about virtue-signaling, we could do worse than use cloth masks – some embroidered ones rise to the level of fashion statements, excusable as such, like piercing and tattoos. Not only would these signal our concern for the health of others but also the environment. Can’t we do both? But the *recommended* masks are not made of biodegradable materials... Some gyre-island in the mid-Pacific will one day reach continental proportions as masks of this sort coalesce into memorials to mass paranoia.

They still open their mouths to eat and drink and lower their masks when they cannot be understood or recognized, tacitly expressing a more urgent concern for being understood than their health.

Dr Keith Moran[27] on mask efficacy: a woeful dearth of good-research

Three major recent Covid-19 related masks studies:

1. Bangladesh: "The Impact of Community Masking on COVID-19: A Cluster-Randomized Trial in Bangladesh," (working paper).

2. Denmark: "Effectiveness of Adding a Mask Recommendation to Other Public Health Measures to Prevent SARS-CoV-2 Infection in Danish Mask Wearers - A Randomized Controlled Trial," *Annals of Internal Medicine*, March 2021.

3. U.S. CDC: "Effectiveness of Face Mask or Respirator Use in Indoor Public Settings for Prevention of SARS-CoV-2 Infection - California, February - December 2021, Weekly / February 11, 2022"

Dr. Moran offered this early detailed review (2021) of Bangladesh mask study. The study is, to date, the only large-scale cluster randomized trial of mask efficacy at impeding transmission of Covid-19. Initial indications showed statistically *insignificant* benefits of cloth masks over no masks at all, but *some* benefit of surgical masks over no masks at all. However, a closer analysis of the Bangladesh mask study by an independent team of medical experts showed it to be hampered in a number of ways including size differences between control group and the masked groups, potentially biasing results. In light of this, the most that can be inferred from this study is that surgical masks are marginally better than cloth masks but the cloth masks were, again, nearly worthless. It's not that *we know* masks are worthless, but that we are *still* waiting for the science as it relates to *cloth* and *surgical* mask use *in the general population* to tell us so. (N-95 and KN-95 masks were not part of this study.)

Later, Dr. Moran updated (2022) his assessment of the Bangladesh study, adding reviews of more recent studies from Denmark and the CDC. As noted above, the Bangladesh study lost much of its credibility when more details were examined by the independent group.

The Danish study was small but otherwise well-designed. It showed a small but not statistically significant benefit from wearing masks. The study designers were expecting better. Again, from the small size of the study no resounding conclusions can be drawn either way.

---

27. Others have made similar points, but I single out Dr. Moran's presentation because of his singular, low-key, far from an antivaxxer or fringe perspective. He exudes "Fred Rogers-style" integrity. Like no one at the CDC… From his Youtube channel: "Dr. Keith Moran MD, RCPSC, DABIM, RCS, NBE Biography: I am a consultant in Internal Medicine with special medical interests in gastroenterology, cardiology, and echocardiography. I am a a full-time practising physician in these areas. I was an undergraduate at the University of Toronto, Trinity College where I received a number of scholarships including one for top student at Trinity College. I attended medical school at the University of Toronto graduating with a gold medal. My internship was completed at McMaster University in Hamilton followed by a residency in Internal Medicine at the University of Western Ontario in London. I then completed a fellowship in General Internal Medicine at the University of Western Ontario. I am an active echocardiographer who has been certified and recertified by the National Board of Echocardiography. I am certified in cardiac sonography and have trained and completely educated a number of cardiac sonographers. I am the medical director of my cardiology laboratory which was established in 2001. My laboratory performs echocardiography and stress echocardiography amongst other tests. I maintain my certification in the American Board of Internal Medicine. I have over 27 years of experience as a hospital-based consultant in internal medicine and intensive care unit attending physician."

The CDC study was a particularly egregious instance of misleading science. Coming from an authoritative source, this study drew media attention, magnifying the information damage. Such misinformation from official sources undercuts trust in government and institutions. Its authors even admitted an unusually large number of limitations on the conclusions that could be drawn. Its infographic, widely disseminated by the media, suggested unqualified benefit. It was published on the CDC web site and, as of this writing, is not known to have been peer-reviewed.

People who reported always wearing a mask in indoor public settings were less likely to test positive for COVID-19 than people who didn't*
WEARING A MASK LOWERED THE ODDS OF TESTING POSITIVE
Among 534 participants reporting mask type†
NO MASK
CLOTH MASK#
SURGICAL MASK
RESPIRATOR (N95/KN95)
56% lower odds
66% lower odds
83% lower odds
CDC
bit.ly/MMWR7106
* Matched case-control study, 1,828 people, Feb 10–Dec 1, 2021
† Compared people with similar characteristics (e.g., vaccination)
# Not statistically significant
MMWR

But few read the study carefully, or even the infographic, for that matter: the footnote to cloth masks undercuts the graphical claim: "#Not statistically significant." *How then do they get a 56% reduction in odds of testing positive for cloth masks?* No other study, even the massive Bangladesh study, has suggested anything close to that number. Further, the CDC study compared the symptomatically sick with the well, the vaccinated with the unvaccinated, the tested with the untested, etc. – not to list the full set of confounders. With these observations, the numbers become worthless. But none of this got the scrutiny it deserved from major news outlets. The CDC must believe the public is entirely comprised of morons. The tragedy is that they are probably right. After noting the study methodology was so flawed as to reach new heights of uninformativeness, Dr. Moran comments near the end of the second review:

> It's hard to imagine that someone associated with this study would not look critically at their work and question its shortcomings. This erodes confidence in evidence-based medicine and of course trust will get lost because of it. Some might even say they are pushing a narrative or even propaganda. I wouldn't say that, I would say it's a poorly done study that does not merit publishing even if it's only on their website. The problem is media talks about what the CDC publishes and people retweet and post it on their social media accounts as if it's hard evidence-based medical facts which it's not. It could very well be harmful because people might think that just because they're wearing a cloth mask that they're highly protected in higher risk indoor settings when it could not be further from the truth. Again, there's not any clinical evidence that cloth masks are beneficial against this virus...

He concludes with a sane recommendation and a lament:

1. the elderly, especially those with comorbidities, i.e., "the vulnerable," stand to benefit from *strategic* use of *specifically* N-95 or KN-95 masks. Some evidence supports this, and

2. it is irresponsible that this late in the pandemic we still do not have clear evidence that the risks outweigh the benefits for everyone else and for other more accessible mask-types.

Risks? Yes, there are some and they don't have to be great to obviate the marginal benefit for the few:

Something to note: how *disposable surgical* masks are worn in hospital settings

From *Proof That Face Masks Do More Harm Than Good*, Dr Vernon Coleman MB ChB Dsc.

> Surgeons have been using surgical masks since their introduction in 1897. It has for some years been customary for surgeons and nurses to wear surgical masks in the operating theatre and to change masks part of the way through any procedure lasting more than a few hours. The dangers associated with mask wearing were assessed by five doctors and published in the journal *Neurocirugia* in 2008.
>
> Although it is customary for operating theatres to be fitted with air conditioning systems, the writers of the article, entitled, *Preliminary Report on Surgical Mask induced Deoxygenation During Major Surgery*, [*Neurocirugia*, 2008] pointed out that it is known that heat and moisture are trapped beneath surgical masks and concluded that 'it seems reasonable that some of the exhaled carbon dioxide may also be trapped beneath them, inducing a decrease in blood oxygenation'.
>
> A total of 53 surgeons, of both sexes, all employed at university hospitals and aged between 24 and 54 years of age were tested. All were non-smokers and none had any chronic lung disease. The test involved pulse oximetry before and after the course of an operation. The study showed that the longer a mask was worn the greater the fall in blood oxygen levels. This may lead to the individual passing out and it may also affect natural immunity – thereby increasing the risk of infection.
>
> The masks used were *disposable, sterile, one-way surgical paper masks*. [emphasis added – these are the most common masks currently in use by the public] To eliminate the effect of dehydration over a several hour surgical operation, the surgeons were allowed after every hour to drink water through a straw.
>
> The authors of the paper concluded that, 'When the values for oxygen saturation of haemoglobin were compared, there were statistically significant differences only between preoperational and post operational values. As the duration of the operation increases, oxygen saturation of haemoglobin decreases significantly.'

More recent work on CO2 concentrations behind *N-95* masks and the even better PAPR systems

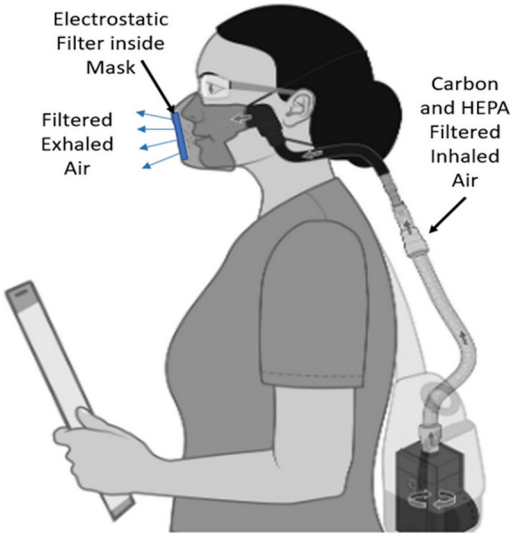
From, "Carbon dioxide increases with face masks but remains below short-term NIOSH limits," *BMC Infectious Diseases* (2021) 21:354. Conclusion [*emphasis added*]:

> Although, significant increase in CO2 concentrations are noted with routinely used face-masks, the levels still remain within the NIOSH limits for *short-term* use. Therefore, there should not be a concern in their regular day-to-day use for *healthcare providers*. The clinical implications of elevated CO2 levels with *long-term use of face masks needs further studies*. Use of PAPR prevents relative hypercapnoea. However, whether PAPR should be advocated for healthcare workers requiring PPE for extended hours needs to evaluated in further studies.

Note that this study describes *acceptable* tolerances for CO2 concentrations for health care works in hospital settings, presumably properly trained on the use of N-95 masks in *short-term* use. The effects of elevated CO2 concentrations "with long-term use of face masks needs further studies." We cannot infer that ordinary people – who, we cannot assume, wear masks properly – wear them *only* short-term or are even aware of what "short-term" means in this context. We can assume they are wearing the near pointless cloth masks or the rather the cheap, but less effective (though less CO2 trapping) surgical masks. Less likely still, the, less cheap, but more effective microbe-impeding N-95 variety knowledgeably – and again doing it *short-term*.

What is a PAPR?...

Powered air purifying respirator



What we should all be wearing if significant masking effect is the goal for the general public in non-hospital seeings... but not even medical professionals wear these except under the most exigent and dangerous conditions. (Money probably has something to do with it.)

Again, either we opt for the "affordable" (at least short-term for *some* human populations) N-95 masks, reasonably effective at impeding microbial passage, but, for that very reason, likely to increase potentially dangerous behind-mask elevated CO2 concentrations in chronic, extended-term use; *or* we go for the common surgical masks which are not as risky in that way but don't arguably do enough to protect ordinary people going about ordinary things to compensate for their contribution to environmental degradation[28]; *or*, alternatively, we are not doing enough to supply the public with the best microbial filters money can buy: *powered air purifying respirators* – the state of the art in respiratory microbe filtering for *indefinite* use. Until, as always, more research indicates otherwise…

Are *indiscriminant* mask-wearing advocates closet "climate change deniers"?

There is not a square inch of the earth's surface, not even in the remotest part of Antarctica, that is not contaminated with micro-plastics.[29] Surgical masks are excellent generators of microscopic bits of these petroleum-based, non-biodegradable materials.

> Since the Covid-19 pandemic began last year, face masks and other personal protective equipment have become essential for health care workers. Disposable N95 masks have been in

28. For potential, if likely unaffordable, solutions, see, "Potential biodegradable face mask to counter environmental impact of Covid-19," *Cleaner Engineering and Technology* Volume 4, October 2021. The marginal effect of many Covid measures, such as masks outside medical settings, too often neglects the costs involved.
29. "Microplastic pollution in Antarctica extremely serious," *Plastic Soup Foundation*.

> especially high demand to help prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19.
>
> All of those masks carry both financial and environmental costs. The Covid-19 pandemic is estimated to generate up to 7,200 tons of medical waste every day, much of which is disposable masks.[30]

That is just hospital waste. The use and disposal of masks *outside* medical settings must dwarf that number.

"Face Masks Are Hurting The Environment," Cat Sandoval, *Newsy.com*, January 11, 2022.

"Where did 5,500 tonnes of discarded face masks end up?" Jenny Yeh, *Greenpeace.org*, 14 August 2020.

...

Why so little clarity about masks?

3. Vaccine safety

- **Crossing the blood/brain barrier and thinkable consequences**
  "Vaccine Generated Spike Proteins Circulate in The Blood on Exosomes." Antigenic agents generated by mRNA vaccines are seen in places where normally these don't go and what they do there we can only wonder…

- **The virus adopts the Nietzschean precept: "if it doesn't kill me, it makes me stronger"**
  "Why is Omicron becoming more infectious in highly vaccinated regions?" On the non-negligible possibility that widespread vaccination combined with its failure to neutralize transmission has facilitated the acceleration of normal microbial evolutionary processes in a dangerous direction... Dr. Philip McMillan interviews Geert Vanden Bossche, renowned vaccine expert. For a critique of this dire possibility from the main narrative perspective see "Antibody-dependent Enhancement (ADE) and Vaccines." Note, however, this conventional report, suggesting the Vanden Bossche worry is not evidenced, was last reviewed in September 2021 *before* Omicron, which according to Vanden Bossche and company would be a predictable stage in a virus evolutionary trajectory that is consistent with ADE: first the virus transmits more easily, outpacing vaccine efficacy, then the sheer volume of vaccine-proof virus in the wild increases the chance for mutation in a more virulent direction. Since the non-sterilizing vaccines common in the current pandemic have tricked the immune system into targeting only spike proteins and not the whole virus, virus variants learn, not only to cope with this, but to exploit the information. Moreover, the immune system has essentially been put at a disadvantage in confronting newer, potentially more deadly variants. Apropos of "misinformation," the immune system has been subjected to a microbial version of it *by these non-sterilizing vaccines*. At the scale of current vaccine campaigns, this may be catastrophic. See Appendix 3 for more discussion.

30. *MIT News*, https://news.mit.edu/2021/covid-masks-environment-0720

4. The price of lockdowns

- **"It is possible that lockdown[s] will go down as one of the greatest peacetime policy failures in modern history."**
  "Covid-19 Lockdown Cost/Benefits: A Critical Assessment of the Literature," Douglas W. Allen, *International Journal of the Economics of Business*, Volume 29, 2022 - Issue 1. See also "Dr. Jay Bhattacharya on Our COVID Response," *Reason* interview, Apr 22, 2022. "The Stanford professor and Great Barrington Declaration coauthor stands up to COVID-19 autocrats and disastrous lockdowns by following the science."

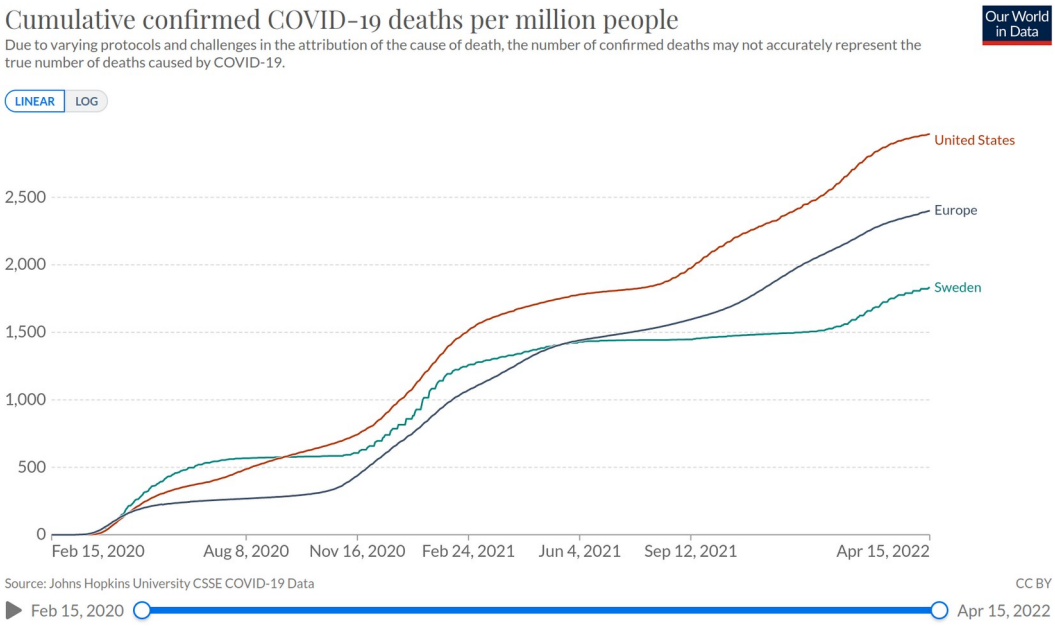
- **Old and sick people are, and have been from the beginning, the main fatal targets of *Covid-19*. The youngest and the poorest are, and have been from the beginning, the main fatal targets of the *pandemic response.*** "Hunger is now killing more people than COVID-19," *Worldvision.ca,* Sep 28, 2021. The implication of the report seems to be that there was a time when Covid-19 killed more... Who has *more* right to live, the old or the young? And does the happenstance of *where* one lives matter? For what it's worth (since moral theory is only a concern to those squeamish enough to think morality *must* have to do with history), we comment, the relative value placed on the young versus old reflected in these numbers and their distribution is offensive to *both* utilitarian *and* deontological sensibilities. To utilitarians because of considerations arising from intuitions from arguments such as those of Don Marquis giving priority to *quantity* of future life. To deontologists, because of the skyscraping imperative to unending conscious moral expansion: the older you get the more you *should* have learned that *quality* counts for more than quantity and the more you *ought* to have realized by then, you are long past your prime – the more reason *should* have forced the realization that each breath you take is one robbed from one more worthy of it than you.[31]

- **How strange:** Surely, there can be no pandemic connection in reports from large life insurance companies that the year 2021 saw in the U.S. death rates 40% higher than the historical average among those of working age: 18 to 65. *Not among the Covid-vulnerable over 65, mind you, where much smaller higher than average rates are reported, but among those in their relative prime.* Statistical anomalies like this would, in ordinary times, be front page news. Not since records have been kept by an industry with a financial interest in getting their numbers right has so much *unexplained* death been observed. It is amusing to see how even those who report on this contort themselves into dumbfoundedness as to what is afoot...

5. The "strange" case of Sweden and the Covid death-race

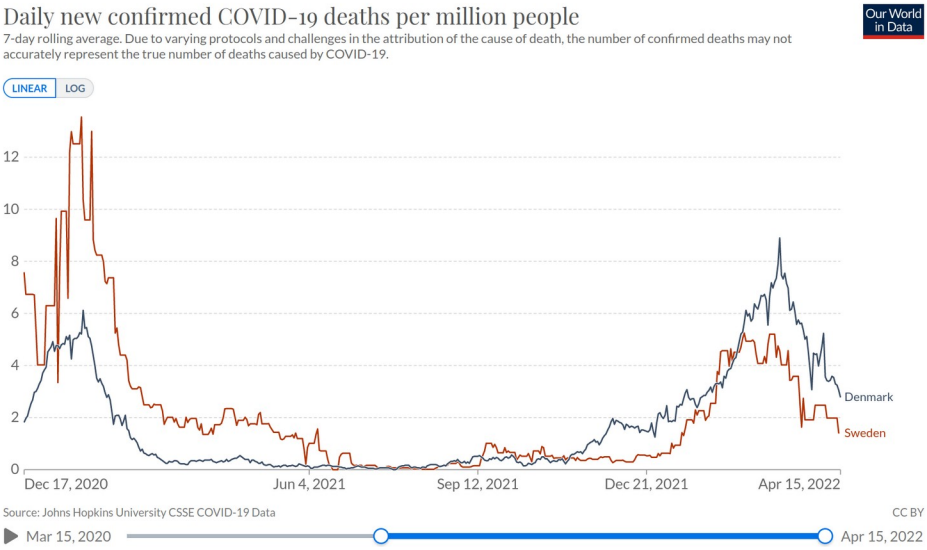
Early in the Covid death race, Sweden got off to a strong start. But its lead was not to last. The US and the whole of Europe caught up and left Sweden in the dust. How did Sweden get it so wrong?

31. Like Otto Weininger, the Kantian "gone mad," who realized this at the precocious age of 23.



Source

Even that slow-poke and comparable neighbor Denmark is making up for lost time.



Source

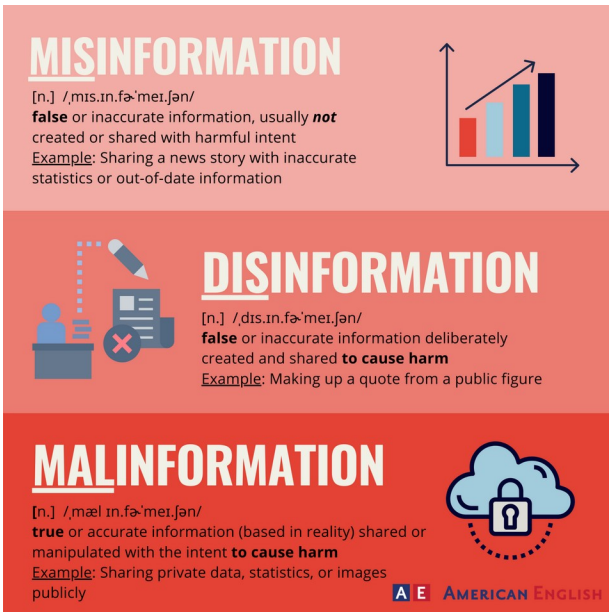
We must resist the temptation to conclude from looking at this chart that a certain number of folks were going to die no matter what we did. No science back of that. A lot of people keeping bad stats is the only explanation.

If anyone is still upright in Sweden today, they must be zombies if we are to take early reports from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* seriously. The phenomenal indifference of the Swedes to the gravity of the pandemic should have killed them off sometime ago (even many Swedes believed this[32]), according to prediction models from "respectable" sources... These voices concerned with what is fit to print and keeping democracy from dying have grown now so deafeningly silent about Sweden you can hear a syringe drop.[33]

32. See "Perception and reality" in the Appendix for the "educational" effect of these media voices.
33. I personally know *at least one* Swede who is still alive despite being classed among the vulnerable. Admittedly, he currently lives in the U.S. and is a vegan. *That* must explain it. On a more "serious" note, Sweden did require vaccine passports for participating in mass events. This sudden get-with-it change of heart lasted all of a few weeks before it was scrapped.

6. Second-class "natural" immunity

"The immunity you get from a jab, multiple and regular ones, is the best kind there is. If you've already had Covid (even if you didn't notice), your protection is *not* real. You still need the jabs." Insinuations, if not clear statements, to this effect have been rampant in the reporting on the advisability of multiple doses of vaccine.


MISINFORMATION
[n.] /ˌmɪs.ɪn.fəˈmeɪ.ʃən/
false or inaccurate information, usually not created or shared with harmful intent
Example: Sharing a news story with inaccurate statistics or out-of-date information
DISINFORMATION
[n.] /ˌdɪs.ɪn.fəˈmeɪ.ʃən/
false or inaccurate information deliberately created and shared to cause harm
Example: Making up a quote from a public figure
MALINFORMATION
[n.] /ˌmæl ɪn.fəˈmeɪ.ʃən/
true or accurate information (based in reality) shared or manipulated with the intent to cause harm
Example: Sharing private data, statistics, or images publicly
AE AMERICAN ENGLISH

"*Mis-*, *dis-*, and *mal-* information"

Note that, according to the info-graphic at the right, taken from the Facebook page of the U.S. Embassy at Kinshasa, *dis*information is *false* and badly motivated. According to the definition of "disinformation" at the official U.S. Government website of the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency,[34] it is less clear whether *dis*information must be false. (See discussion below.) It is enough if it is *malintended*.

Perhaps these definitions have not fully settled even at official sources. We will assume for this discussion the definitions at CISA (because it has enforcement authority). CISA does not give specific examples of the types, instead offering intensional (descriptive) characterizations of "MDM" as:

> Misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation make up what CISA defines as "information activities". When this type of content is released by foreign actors, it can be referred to as foreign influence.

The distinction between foreign and domestic actors is blurred. Then it goes on to define a taxonomy of MDM activities:

> **Misinformation** is false, but not created or shared with the intention of causing harm.
>
> **Disinformation** is deliberately created to mislead, harm, or manipulate a person, social group, organization, or country.
>
> **Malinformation** is based on fact, but used out of context to mislead, harm, or manipulate.

MDM history

34. "Established in 2018, CISA was created to work across public and private sectors, challenging traditional ways of doing business by engaging with government, industry, academic, and international partners." https://www.cisa.gov/about-cisa

The word "*mis*information" with its relative innocence goes back at least to the 15th Century. "*Dis*information," with the signification of malintent, not further back than 1970s. Either it never occurred to anyone to *deliberately* misinform before then, or they did and it was called a "lie."

"*Mal*information" has been around as long as misinformation. It has often been cited as what leads to a mentally decrepit state, analogized with malnutrition, something the underprivileged suffer from. It has moral, even impious, connotations. Its historical use invokes apologetics for sin. Blame in the air is looking a for a place to settle. Somebody or -thing, not me, led me astray. The use of "true information out of context" characteristic of malinformation shifts the badness to a failure of context detection and analysis. *Whose* is the failure? An incompetent, a child, perhaps can be excused. Someone is responsible for not equipping the vulnerable to contend with malinformation. If an otherwise competent is taken in by malinformation, it is the fault of a parent, teacher, an institutional or governmental authority. A presumption of complicity afflicts anyone else. So, assuming no one among those authorities owns up, and you are misled, it must be your fault. Alternatively, we can rid the human world of bad actors who deal in such. What is your formula for telling these apart from the others?

Misinformation is innocent, accidental, maybe negligent or reckless.

Disinformation is very clearly a modern euphemism for a lie.

Malinformation is epistemic misfortune caused by someone's delinquency. It may contain partial, even complete, truths but contextually out of place.

Table of "information activity" types

	true	***false***
malintent	*mal-*	*dis-* [?]
no malintent	[*]	*mis-*

Notes

? Must *dis*information be false? CISA leaves it vague. On the assumption that *to create* implies *to lie*, disinformation is false. But a deliberately concocted, even *malintended*, idea may *turn out* to be true. Scientific and non-self-evident truths, generally, for example, start out as unverified hypotheses, and an hypothesis is somebody's "creation." Other government sources, as in the US Embassy infographic, specify its falsity. Might one *malintend* an hypothesis that may, nevertheless, turn out true? Intentions are logically separable from truth. As acts are from the moral quality of their consequences, and speech acts are from their truth value.[35]

* A *not* badly-intended "information activity" that *happens* to be true is not given a name. Epistemic rigor would suggest it needs one. We can easily imagine it mattering whether a well-meant expression is true *by accident*. Such cases abound in discussions of justified true belief (JTB) theories of knowledge and the Gettier cases that plague them. But we will leave this qualm aside since *extensional*

35. See, for example, the case of Motti Ashkenazi.

truth (listable), not *intensional* truth (descriptive), seems (at first glance) relevant here. What do you care if someone – on faulty, but not ill-intentioned, evidence or reasoning – told you where the restroom was, so long as you find it where they said it was? The restroom was right they said it would be despite the fact they were *unconsciously confused*. Even a broken (12-hour) clock (with no "intentions" at all) tells the truth twice a day.

To the extent you are not omniscient, you are likely engaging in misinformation every time you open your mouth.

Two questions

1. How is *intent* determined?

2. And who decides what is *true*?

Short answers: first, determining intent can be among the difficult inferential activities (law books are full of examples); second, truth may be empirically determined *or* settled by authority. Now, *which is which?* Longer ones:

Discussion: intent

The relevance of *intent*: why do you care about "intent"? Functionally, intent may be shorthand for an inductive inference about the future activity of the information actor. If enough circumstantial/empirical evidence convinces you the information activity was "intentional," it may help you predict and prepare for future behavior from the actor. But note that if the intent was *not* bad but only *accidentally* related to the truth, this *too* ought to be relevant to what you can expect from this actor in the future. This is why good-intentions are not enough even if, from a given information act, no undesirable consequences follow.[36]

Example: someone complies with a general precept: they are vaccine *compliant* because they deferred to a community-validated authority. Not because they personally understood or critically evaluated the reasoning behind the suggestion or directive. What can you infer from this about what to expect of them in the future? That they are likely to comply when told what to do by such an authority.[37] From this, you may infer they are not likely to be troublesome characters. If you are a government, this is a welcome observation.

If they are vaccine *hesitant* or *opposed*, regardless of motivation, you may infer they will require more attention from a precept-enforcement perspective. More education, indoctrination, positive or negative incentives, even force may be called for.

If hesitance is motivated by genuine ignorance, information can (theoretically[38]) fix that. If it is intransigence that is operative, the remedy may be orders of magnitude harder, depending on whether it

36. We are *naturally* less suspicious of intent when we approve of the consequences. Why? Consequentialism builds on this fact of human nature. While Kantians see it as fundamentally immoral because of the reduction of human agency to descriptions of our nature, which has consequences for conceiving the possibility of moral reform and progress.
37. You can see here how Gettier-inspired qualms may insert themselves.
38. Assuming, the information is well presented and the target audience has the mental resources to appropriate it.

is of the *lay* or *elite* form.[39] Government agencies (such as CISA) in conjunction with, even more potent, public/private allegiances are reasonably equipped to manage *lay* hesitancy. Ignorance does not serve its afflicted well, and the intransigence makes them easy targets for manipulation by whatever means.

However, the case of *elite* hesitancy is more difficult, requiring a more sophisticated reaction on the part of those who seek to manage it. People who ask questions must be given answers (to keep up democratic appearances). The answers needn't be true but they must be convincing. The degree of persuasion will vary with the level of elite hesitancy. Fortunately for the relevant authority, elite hesitancy on this order is relatively rare. The principles that motivate this kind of hesitancy may be coopted – at least up to a point. This will diminish the threat. The hesitance remaining after these techniques have been employed can largely be ignored. The elite are almost by definition small enough to be "enfringed" or pathologized.

Thus, co-opt where possible, cancel (erase) or enfringe where necessary.

Discussion: truth

As to the second question: *who* decides what is true? Outside of philosophy, these will be, as Thrasymachus implied long ago in Plato's *Republic,* those *empowered* to stipulate it.[40] What's science got to do with truth?

Blurring distinctions

Indented passages are from the CISA site.

1. The distinction between *foreign* and *domestic* actors is blurred:

> CISA's Mis-, Dis-, and Malinformation (MDM) team is charged with building national resilience to MDM and foreign influence activities. Through these efforts, CISA helps the American people understand the scope and scale of MDM activities targeting elections and critical infrastructure, and enables them to take actions to mitigate associated risks. The MDM team was formerly known as the Countering Foreign Influence Task Force (CFITF).

MDM is presumed to be *always* rooted in foreign interests. Domestic cooperatives are instrumental to foreign interests: that is, there can be no *genuine* domestic interest aligned with the foreign. Thus, the justification for involvement of *international* counter intelligence agencies in *domestic* controversy.

2. The distinction between public governmental and private corporate interests[41] is blurred:

39. We discussed earlier Stephen David John's distinction between lay and elite forms of hesitancy.
40. Thasymachus addressed, specifically, the provenance of "justice." The added premise "might makes right" implicates "truth." Concentrations of power decide these things. Ethical and epistemic ideals are promulgated as fronts for exercises of power as in the institutionalization of altruism in the idea of "Effective Altruism."
41. "Public" government, according to political philosopher Elizabeth Anderson, means power concentrations with at least a *formal* democratic element, i.e., *some or the appearance of some* accountability to the governed. By "private" government, she means the same but *without* the accountability to the governed (the accountability, such as it is, may be to stock-

> The MDM team continues to work in close coordination with interagency and private sector partners, social media companies, academia, and international partners on a variety of projects to build resilience against malicious information activities.

Public/private partnerships are announced. These already individually potent entities further coalesce into "power concentrations" tasked with the control of public discourse. To avoid adding the predicate "toxic" to "power concentrations," assurance that these concentrations may be trusted is required. Whence the assurance?

> Foreign and domestic threat actors use MDM campaigns to cause chaos, confusion, and division.

Now that "domestic" has been implicated, there is no effective difference in how foreign and domestic interests should be treated: this forecloses internal dissent: you cannot possibly criticize your government's authority without risking association with foreign interests and agency.

> These malign actors are seeking to interfere with and undermine our democratic institutions and national cohesiveness. The resources provided at the bottom of this page provide examples and more information about MDM activities.

> **Building Resilience**

> The MDM team's plan for building national resilience through public awareness and engagement is focused on engaging three categories of stakeholders to enable a whole-of-society approach:

Whatever efficacy "critical thinking" skills had (or used to have), it is no longer adequate to "building resilience." We need to recruit the "whole-of-society" into becoming "stakeholders" in a common project.

> **Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)** – The MDM team engages SMEs to enhance our understanding of the threat and how to mitigate the impact of information activities, to include how best to message to the public. SMEs include researchers, think tanks, and marketing/advertising experts.

Researchers and thinkers to suss out fact and "marketing/advertising experts" to put lipstick on it.

> **Trusted Voices** – The federal government cannot solve the MDM problem on its own. We need both trusted voices and those who can amplify resilience messaging. Trusted voices include state and local government officials, community leaders, and associations. The engagement with trusted voices helps the MDM team reach communities targeted by previous MDM campaigns.

---

holders), instanced by private corporate entities, including "effectively altruistic" meta-nonprofits mentioned above. When these partner, if not meld – one financing the hegemony of the other – even the semblance of democratic ideals is sustainable only through organized MDM.

"Trusted voices" does *not* include independent thinkers with Youtube channels, unless, of course, they are members of the...

> **American Public** – In addition to working with Trusted Voices, the MDM team develops informational products and tools for use by the American people. Each of us has the power to stop information activities. The MDM team is focused on helping all Americans understand how bad actors are targeting them and what they can do to ensure those actors are not successful...

"American" people have "the power to stop information activities." SMEs, trusted voices, and American public are the only sources positioned to fact-check and adjudicate MDM.

> **COVID-19 Response**
>
> As COVID-19 spread around the globe, mis-, dis-, and malinformation (MDM) spread as well. COVID-19-related MDM activities seek to undermine public confidence and sow confusion. COVID-19 has demonstrated that a rapidly evolving event creates opportunities for adversaries to act maliciously. It also shows that rapid evolution of accurate information makes older, dated information a potential catalyst of confusion and distrust as well. The MDM team supports the interagency and private sector partners' COVID-19 response efforts via regular reporting and analysis of key pandemic-related MDM trends.

Between bad foreign actors (Putin, maybe?), homegrown "morons" and "despicables," and microbes so small that electron microscopes have trouble telling them apart from waste material floating in our blood stream,[42] the past four years have made it necessary to suspend judgment.

The conceptual implausibility of "conspiracy theories"

Successful ones. History is littered with the failures. Nations, the League of Nations, the United Nations… to name some of the grander ones. Note: one person's "nefarious" end is another's "noble" one. The grander the alleged conspiracy the *less* likely its motive will be "nefarious." The grander, the more potent, the more able it is to distort its moral environs, as massive objects do gravity in their corner of space-time[43]. "Successful" ones are not a threat because their requisites are never met, hence never rise to the occasion of existing. A *successful* conspiracy is an oxymoron. Two or more people may join forces for nefarious ends, but these are not conspiracies; conspiracies are supposed to be majorly *potent* and operate *discreetly*. Little, comparatively harmless, "conspiracies" – marriages, couples, for instances – are not what is meant when the phrase is used, not for lack of mal- or mis-

---

42. The best understanding we have of virus-sized microbes is biochemical, not visual. A biochemical condition in an organism may have a variable etiologies. E.g., you may die *with* Covid without it being true that you die *of* Covid. As with many other diseased conditions. See "Why misinterpretation of electron micrographs in SARS-CoV-2-infected tissue goes viral," *The Lancet*, Correspondence | Volume 396, ISSUE 10260, October 31, 2020.

43. Power is necessary to accomplish anything and is, as such, morally neutral. Power *concentration* is only necessary because there is evil at the door. Born of it, it devolves to it, when the threat retreats, guaranteeing that unjust oppression never ends.

intent, but because they are limited in their secrecy and power to do general harm. Rather, the idea conjures a *grand* coalition of intelligence, ability, resources, discretion, *and* nefarious motives.

Telling people the truth to counter harm done by believing false things is supposed to be a salutary measure. If truth is to be effective, it must *alter* orientation, attitudes, and behavior. *Fact must manipulate.* Truth *manipulative*? Suggesting something *good* about manipulation or something *bad* about truth? Which?

If the latter, it raises the question how can "truth" manipulate without the *culpable* involvement of the manipulated? Why is anyone taken in by "out of context" assertions except through sloppy thinking, gullibility, and lack of critical-mindedness? If they are, don't they deserve it? But, like a parent, government has a duty to protect its vulnerable charges. They *cannot* be trusted to engage in due diligence. Democracy consists in its constituents doing what they are told *at all times* (not just election time) *and* feeling good about it. But for this understanding of democracy to be sustainable, the governed must be MDMed into seeing theirs as the best of possible worlds and appreciating their good fortune to be living in it. But for all state attempts at aspiring to conspiratorial success, getting enough compliance in a healthy democracy is like herding cats. If you can herd them, it is not a democracy – or they are not cats.

In fact, maybe everyone benefits from the vulnerability of the governed. Is it possible that these just listed child-like traits of a population are features, not flaws, of a system that benefits more often than harms it by their being endemic? For example, if only it were the case that *vaccine compliance* were in individual instances as motivated by well thought out research (as opposed to uncritical deference to authority) as *vaccine hesitancy* is by knee-jerk suspicions of conspiracy. In either case, it is not. The involvement of government/corporate interests in curating and disseminating "authoritative" information is evidence of this.

Here is why conspiracy theories – as explanations for why things are not going your way – are not coherent: They require critical intelligence *at scale* to pull off and they must find truly innocent victims *at scale*. The scale requirement dooms them. There isn't enough intelligence in the concentrations necessary, and the would-be victims are only too ready to comply, thus undercutting their victimhood. *These unholy coalitions either collapse into more transparent corruption or the complicity of their victims obviates the nefariousness.* (Usually both – which I guess makes them a "conspiracy" of sorts between victim and victimizer – but minus the secretiveness.) Bad outcomes may result from the attempts but there are not enough fingers to point at all the "responsibles." And no one is inclined to, anyway. Better to remain at the level of aspersion and keeps things vague. The result can be a useful object of allusion for distraction. We have allergies to truth. Take the "meta-non-profit"… Nothing shady, it's all done in broad daylight. Who needs conspiracies when it's all plain as day?

"Misinformation" and "noble lies"

Early we made the uncharitable claim that "a charge of misinformation is a peculiarly *toxic* euphemism for lying or bullshitting. Its invocation is used to *forestall* inquiry. Forestalling inquiry is epistemically toxic. It is an abuse of euphemism." But what if the euphemism is *justified* in the interest of national or social "cohesiveness," as suggested by the CISA understanding quoted above? MDM activities that "undermine public confidence and sow confusion" no matter their epistemic status – true, false,

speculative, etc., what does that matter in comparison with their potential to damage public "resilience"?

At the start, I offered a negative definition. CISA suggests a positive one. Charges of misinformation can be motivated by the highest ideals that hold society together. By excluding ideas that sow dissension and atomize precious solidarity, aspersions of misinformation protect the adhesive that holds society together, forming the foundation of all the good that ever happens within a given community of persons. Back in the early1960s, British jurist and philosopher of law, Lord Devlin called social/moral norms, and their preservation – i.e., enforcement – the "glue" that allows civilization to flourish.[44] Morality is not what society is supposed to enforce, rather morality (of whatever sort is present and potent) is the very thing that holds the human environment together. He thought good old Judeo-Christian values – frowning as they did on homosexuality, legalized prostitution, abortion, etc. – were perfectly functional *as is* and wouldn't benefit from the instability that comes with the rational reform his critics[45] were pushing. We needn't believe these morals are God-given or the best we might do. The problem was that to permit them to be seen as provisional and eternally subject to reform undermines any force they have *now*. He argued that being *static* is an indispensable feature of a value system. Anything less marks a path to moral nihilism. He was not the first to make the point. Something along these lines can be derived from Aristotle's theory of what constitutes "virtue" *in a community*.

Truth-seeking, at any cost, is *not* virtuous. Better to *shape* the truth around what *is* virtuous. And what is virtuous is what keeps a given society together and functioning in its own self-preservation. An accusation of misinformation may be one tool, among others, serviceable for this end. "Misinformation" has softer innuendos than flat-out "lies" or "bullshit," allowing tension an off-ramp. We are allowed to think ignorance or misunderstanding explains the lapse. And surely that's fixable with a little effort. If only all sides give a little (some, of course, more than others, less the ones you are partial to), we may arrive at Hobbes's imperative: Seek peace!

Perhaps, then, my definition of misinformation, that it essentially *forestalls inquiry,* and those like CISA's – that, properly targeted charges of it, *promote and preserve social solidarity* – are not that far apart? They describe the same thing. Like a glass half-full *and* half-empty?...

The ends of *truth* and *life* are in tension, then. Euphemism helps finesse our way past the rough spots... "Excuse, not justification," truth counters.

THE POLITICS OF LYING

Socrates' introduction of the *Republic*'s notorious "noble lie" comes near the end of Book 3 (414b-c). "We want one single, grand lie," he says, "which will be believed by everybody - including the rulers, ideally, but failing that the rest of the city." Grand lie? Noble lie? G. R. F. Ferrari has a good note on the issue: "The lie is grand or noble (*gennaios*) by virtue of its civic purpose, but the Greek word can also be used colloquially, giving the meaning 'a true-blue lie,' i.e. a massive, no-doubt-about-it lie (compare the term 'grand larceny')." This is not the only

44. "A rebel may be rational in thinking that he is right but he is irrational if he thinks that society can leave him free to rebel." wrote Devlin in "The Enforcement of Morals," *Proceeding of the British Academy*, p.151. Socrates got what we had coming, to think otherwise, Devlin would argue. Another (usually considered more Socratic) perspective on the competing values that rise to the fore when morality and legality collide is M. L King's "Letter from [the] Birmingham Jail."
45. H. L. A. Hart and Mill-inspired progressive philosophers.

point on which there might be argument about the translation. Some prefer to “lie” the more neutral “falsehood” (which need not imply deliberate deception), others “fiction ” (perhaps trying to prescind from questions of truth and falsehood altogether). Cornford had “bold flight of invention.” I think “lie” is exactly right. But the argument for that will emerge later, in section II.

The noble lie is to serve as charter myth for Plato’s good city: a myth of national or civic identity - or rather, two related myths, one grounding that identity in the natural brotherhood of the entire indigenous population (they are all autochthonous, literally born from the earth), the other making the city’s differentiated class structure a matter of divine dispensation (the god who molds them puts different metals in their souls). If people can be made to believe it, they will be strongly motivated to care for the city and for each other.[46]

Bullshit or “transparent” misinformation

Misinformation and stupidity. What about Trump? He did not misinform people. He was too inept for that. He *bullshat* people. There is a difference. It has to do with the real or presumed intelligence level of the *affected* audience. Only the hopeless are proper victims of bullshit. Victims of misinformation, those genuinely taken in by it (as opposed to merely aware of it) *can* be of average, even exceptional intelligence. There is a difference between being *capable* of discrimination in one’s beliefs and the actual practice of discrimination. Doxastic discrimination is *skill* knowledge, not *propositional* knowledge. It is like being able to ride a bike, not like knowing the capital of France. People of great expertise in any area cannot be presumed to have general doxastic discriminative abilities in proportion to those they may have within their area of expertise. The more narrow – hence, authoritative – the expertise, the more we may expect this to be the case. This makes even highly intelligent people vulnerable. And the lack of wide recognition of a doxastic disability makes their influence especially toxic. We want to defer to expertise. This is understandable, but not epistemically or (when the stakes are high) morally responsible. In addition, to intelligence, the moral courage to ask questions uninhibited by extra-epistemic consequences is required to combat victimization by misinformation.

Anyone *genuinely* misinformed by Trump as when, for example, he “suggested”[47] drinking bleach to treat a Covid infection is epistemically hopeless. If their desperation was so great that they were vulnerable to this kind of guidance, if they were born so recently as yesterday, it is too late (or early) in their educational career to disabuse them. But this had nothing to do with Trump’s genuine appeal. Trump supporters would have committed mass suicide if that had been the case. They didn’t. Because these hopeless ones were few. When the country elected him once and nearly elected him again, it was not because of them. It had to do with the fact that he was an effective lightning rod for deep and widespread disaffection. Perfectly *justified* disaffection. Recall the comment at the top about the cynicism... As I have argued before, Trump was a symptom of the morbidity of what is still called misleadingly “representative democracy,”[48] an opportunistic infection the victim had long been primed for.

---

46. *The Cambridge Companion to Plato’s Republic*, “6 - The Noble Lie,” Malcolm Schofield.
47. He didn’t actually say this literally. He spoke about a “disinfectant” and how something like it might “clean” our insides.
48. On what might be amiss with current understandings of “representative democracy,” see our previous topics, “Pitting devils, democracy, and ‘executive aggrandizement’” and “Democracy and its discontents: an alternative to elections.”

And post-Trump? We traded in a moron for a demented old fart – and did so with *relief!* Blaming Trump for being unable to find among the 330 million residents of the most powerful nation on the planet anyone better suited to lead... How many infections can the victim stand before succumbing to fodder for more natural selection?

We lurch from one disaster to another. And it is not just an American phenomenon. Like Covid, mass stupidity knows no national borders. How to cure our obsession with Covid? How about a war? Maybe some expert will propose masks to stop bullets?

Trump bullshat. Bullshitting works when the victim conspires with the use of language to enable action or manipulate people. It works when faith in rational conversation is dead. What kills it?

Lack of trust.

What causes that?

Institutionalized lies, bullshit, and misinformation. More Trumpism ahead…

Why do we allow the conditions for these to persist?

Because it is easier than facing the hypocrisy of our ideals (civility, justice, democracy, etc.). Things must get much worse for this to change. Thankfully, they are.

Why is there no better way?

Because, by and large, we are hopeless at the task of truth-seeking. It is perhaps impossibly hard to keep up with the effort to confront all the reasons we don't want to hear it.

Why is that?

Because nothing about natural selection favors it except instrumentally. Recall, it was always about *survival*, not wisdom. The latter does not make you fit. At best, it offers a perverse solace. But the gene pool gets by fine for the duration with a minimum of it. It is transparently anthropocentric to attribute ideals to natural designs. No other species has escaped its mortal fate, why do we think we are an exception?

Because natural selection has programmed optimism into us.

Yes, can't argue with that. But it makes me sad, somehow.

Can we do anything about this condition?

Collectively, we will have to wait for evolution to unroll a bit more to see. Transhumanists and antinatalists have tidy solutions.

Will enough of us take them seriously?

I doubt it. Collectively, we will go on as we have. Until one day we don't. As individuals, I guess we may be excused for busying ourselves with what allows better sleep.

The pause

The core theme of this discussion has been the irresolvable[49] clash between an important *epistemic* and an important *moral*[50] virtue, between an imperative *to seek truth* and another *not to undermine the community* that makes any virtue operative. Truth-seeking is ostensibly a critical feature of individual rationality and morality. *At the same time,* we owe regard to the social environment that created and sustains our individuality. The *intrinsic incompatibility* of these two values is easily buried until a crisis reveals the precarity of their working arrangement. It is as good a reason as any to avoid crises in order to preclude the uneasy tension from breaking out, revealing the precarity, and subverting the possibility of community. Having not avoided them, we must contend with the clash.

The Socrates story is instructive on both imperatives. At his trial, he defended the truth-seeking imperative at the cost of a death sentence.[51] Awaiting his sentence to be carried out, he illustrated the power of the second imperative by refusing to escape the consequences of his having defended truth-seeking at the ultimate cost. *The* state that had nurtured, educated, and made possible the edification of the person he became, that permitted him to flourish for a time – with whatever value his existence had thereby accrued – *that* state was owed respect. It decreed he should die having violated *its* law and the notion of order it was in a position to define. The personal integrity he so rationally defended and the virtue this signaled entailed that he accept the state's verdict to the letter.[52]

He had the *moral* right, not to say, *duty* to defend the truth as he saw it. But the state had the *legal right and political authority* to make him pay a price for exercising his right and doing his duty. He accepted the situation just as described.

He refused every opportunity he was offered to exile himself. Nothing stood between him and escaping the hemlock but a drunken, sleepy, easily corrupted guard. He had the support of powerful and influential friends who begged him to accept their help. He refused. It would be unseemly given the devotion he had shown to the truth-seeking project as he understood it. The persuasive efficacy of his defense was not ultimately up to him. He did his duty by it. He expressed it. What became of him in the aftermath of his trial, in his human environment, was no longer his business. He knew this going in. What Caesar gives, Caesar may take away.[53]

Pause to consider the clash of these imperatives…

---

49. That's *our* claim, that it is "irresolvable."
50. I use the term "moral" here loosely – strictly, it should be "social" – because morality is usually taken to involve regard for *others*, individually or collectively. Kant would disagree. It only takes *one* rationally autonomous agent to be moral: you can be moral alone on a desert island, because you can have duties to yourself. Socrates would agree. Personal integrity is rooted in this possibility.
51. *The Apology*. *Truth-seeking* should not be confused with *truth-possessing*. Socrates owned none, if you can believe him. Truth-seeking is compatible with *any* theory of truth, even the denial or deflation of truth as an end altogether. The kind of mental life a truth-seeker may lead need not end up anywhere. The journey, carried out as though there were such a thing, can seem meaningfully adequate.
52. *Crito*.
53. To prefigure both Caesar and Jesus.

You have a right to claim you were not born yesterday. It's the only *right you have.*

– Bianco Luno

Extended writeup for the topic hosted at

The Philosophy Club in April 2022

– Victor Muñoz

Guanajuato / Seattle

Related

This is the latest Covid-related topic in a series spanning the past two years. It is curious how much has changed and stayed the same.

Part 1 - A tragedy of errors: Covid-19, fallacies, biases and trust
April 22, 2020
https://covid.philosophy.exposed/

Part 2 - Covid-19: virus v. world
April 29, 2020
https://covid2.philosophy.exposed/

Part 3 - Camus: The Plague
May 20, 2020
https://camus-plague.philosophy.exposed/

Part 4 - Gaslit: how nature, both out- and inside of us, plots our collective insanity
June 3, 2020
https://gaslit.philosophy.exposed/

Part 5 - Covid-19 update: so where are we in our ignorance?
September 9, 2020
http://covid4.philosophy.exposed/

Part 6 - Can vaccine hesitancy be rational?
December 5, 2021
https://vaccine-hesitancy.philosophy.exposed/

Part 7 - Philosophy of science basics: biomedicine, virology, and Covid-19
January 2, 2022
https://covid-science.philosophy.exposed/

Part 8 - Philosophy and "misinformation" go way back…
April 24, 2022
https://misinformation.henid.com/

Appendix

1. "An abundance of caution" - back in 2015

"'Out of an abundance of caution' – An overused phrase" Tara Kirk Sell and Crystal Boddie (July 22, 2015) "The Bifurcated Needle" Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins.

[Note: this article was originally accessed by me in 2020 at http://www.bifurcatedneedle.com/new-blog/2015/7/22/out-of-an-abundance-of-caution-an-overused-phrase**. Whence this copy. On April 21, 2022, the site was still accessible. On April 23, 2022, it *ceased* being accessible, though it is still cited** elsewhere **on the Internet... It *must* be a coincidence.]**

THE BIFURCATED NEEDLE

"Out of an abundance of caution" – An overused phrase

By Tara Kirk Sell and Crystal Boddie

Last October, when fear about Ebola was at its height in the US, we saw the phrase, "out of an abundance of caution" being used to justify just about anything under the sun. Want to ban kids from schools because they shared a continental land mass with Ebola victims? Go ahead and do it out of an abundance of caution. Want to confine anyone who gets sick on an airplane to the bathroom for a whole flight? Go ahead and do it out of an abundance of caution. In fact, out of an abundance of caution, we

should really plan to never read anything online again, so that we can be sure that the phrase never takes hold in our brains.

Now that the fear around Ebola has died down, it's a saner moment to think about what that phrase really does. It allows businesses, schools, leaders in the government, and others in charge to enact policies that are scientifically unfounded but potentially irrational and, sometimes, to infringe upon the rights of others. We are hardly the first to complain about over-reaching policies set out of an abundance of caution, but it's a recurring problem worth considering.

Making decisions in a responsible way means weighing potential outcomes with the chances that those outcomes might occur. The phrase, "out of an abundance of caution," is often used when explaining an action that isn't necessary, but is going to be done anyway because you want to be extra careful. Unfortunately, this throws the whole decision making process for a loop, because it assumes that there are no consequences for overly cautious and unnecessary actions. Yet these actions always have a cost – in money, resources, time and, sometimes, civil liberties.

Further, using the phrase undermines the science-based messages surrounding risk. During the Ebola outbreak, public health officials repeatedly cited science-based messages that the disease could only be transmitted by people experiencing symptoms of the disease and that there was no science-based rationale for putting asymptomatic individuals in quarantine. The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals highlighted these points in a manual on Ebola (the link to the document has since been removed from the website) then noted that quarantine would be used in Louisiana regardless of risk category.

What the phrase really suggests to the public is that these actions were actually needed, otherwise they wouldn't be done. Either something is necessary, and should be done, or is unnecessary and shouldn't be done. One justification for acting out of an abundance of caution is calming public fears. But do these actions actually calm public fears, or do they make a threat seem bigger than it really is? A better approach is to be transparent about what we know about risks, what science says we should do to minimize those risks, and maybe most importantly, be clear about what we don't know. A transparent approach to communicating risk has been shown again and again to be more effective than trying to obfuscate the facts and make one sweeping decision "out of an abundance of caution."

Using the phrase to justify our actions is tempting, especially when we are a little scared and not sure what to do. But let's be honest with ourselves and others about the risks we face and act accordingly, rather than out of an abundance of caution.

It would be crazy to think that thousands of Americans could be rounded up, out an abundance of caution, to spend the next few years in the middle of our country in internment camps. Yet, that happened to thousands of Japanese-American citizens during World War II. So let's avoid falling into the "out of abundance of caution" mindset. It's often used to justify actions on the margins of advisability, and in reality it usually serves to signal a dangerous combination of fear and rashness.

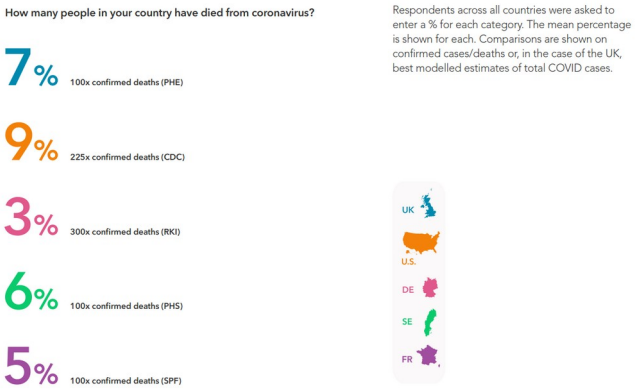
Tags Communication, Ebola

2. Perception and reality

From "Sweden's inconvenient Covid victory: Were millions of people denied freedom for nothing? Was it worth it?" Johan Anderberg, *Unherd* April 2022.

> ...it seemed they had been fed a non-contextualised picture of how serious the Covid-19 pandemic really was. During the Spring and Summer, the global consultancy firm Kekst CNC had asked people in five big democracies — the UK, Germany, France, the US, and Japan — about all kinds of things relating to the virus and society. The sixth country in the survey was Sweden. Sweden was a lot smaller than the other countries, but was included due to the unique path it was taking through the pandemic.
>
> The questions were about everything, ranging from people's opinions on actions taken by the authorities, to the state of the job market, and on whether they thought their governments were providing sufficient support to trade and industry. The twelfth and final topic in the survey contained two questions: "How many people in your country have had the coronavirus? How many people in your country have died?" At the same time as increasingly reliable figures were trickling in with regard to the actual deadliness of Covid-19, there was now a study of the number that people *believed* had died.

See the fullKekst CNC report: "Covid-19 Opinion Tracker".


How many people in your country have died from coronavirus?
Respondents across all countries were asked to enter a % for each category. The mean percentage is shown for each. Comparisons are shown on confirmed cases/deaths or, in the case of the UK, best modelled estimates of total COVID cases.
7% 100x confirmed deaths (PHE)
9% 225x confirmed deaths (CDC)
3% 300x confirmed deaths (RKI)
6% 100x confirmed deaths (PHS)
5% 100x confirmed deaths (SPF)
UK
U.S.
DE
SE
FR

> In the US, the average guess in mid-July was that 9% of the population had died. If that had been true, it would have corresponded to almost 30 million Americans deaths. The death toll was thus overestimated by 22,500% — or 225 times over. In the UK as well as in France and Sweden, the death toll was exaggerated a hundredfold. The Swedish guess of 6% would have corresponded to 600,000 deaths in the country. By then, the official death toll was more than 5,000 and inching closer to 6,000.

3. Vanden Bossche: The non-negligible possibility that current vaccine campaigns are/have set us up for disaster

Re: Geert Vanden Bossche:

> Geert Vanden Bossche received his DVM from the University of Ghent, Belgium, and his PhD degree in Virology from the University of Hohenheim, Germany. He held adjunct faculty appointments at universities in Belgium and Germany. After his career in Academia, Geert

joined several vaccine companies (GSK Biologicals, Novartis Vaccines, Solvay Biologicals) to serve various roles in vaccine R&D as well as in late vaccine development.

Geert then moved on to join the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Global Health Discovery team in Seattle (USA) as Senior Program Officer; he then worked with the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) in Geneva as Senior Ebola Program Manager. At GAVI he tracked efforts to develop an Ebola vaccine. He also represented GAVI in fora with other partners, including WHO, to review progress on the fight against Ebola and to build plans for global pandemic preparedness.

Back in 2015, Geert scrutinized and questioned the safety of the Ebola vaccine that was used in ring vaccination trials conducted by WHO in Guinea. His critical scientific analysis and report on the data published by WHO in the *Lancet* in 2015 was sent to all international health and regulatory authorities involved in the Ebola vaccination program. After working for GAVI, Geert joined the German Center for Infection Research in Cologne as Head of the Vaccine Development Office. He is at present primarily serving as a Biotech / Vaccine consultant while also conducting his own research on Natural Killer cell-based vaccines.

The following quoted passages attempt to relay a critical message. It is from a recently published (May 2022) "An Open Letter to Parents and Pediatricians Regarding COVID Vaccination," *presented in the least technical way possible consistent with scientific rigor*. It is meant for advising parents and pediatric clinicians on the complex and underappreciated risks of indiscriminant vaccine uptake, written by Dr. Robert M. Rennebohm and based on the work of Geert Vanden Bossche. The entire, heavily documented, 100+ page report can be found here.

SECTION 4: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A PANDEMIC LIKE THE COVID PANDEMIC IS PRIMARILY TREATED WITH A MASS VACCINATION CAMPAIGN, USING A SUB-OPTIMAL (NON- STERILIZING) VACCINE?

The current COVID pandemic has been primarily managed with roll out of a rapid, mass vaccination campaign (across all age groups), using sub-optimal (non-sterilizing) uni-dimensional vaccines (directed at only the spike protein), in the midst of the active pandemic and in the midst of considerable lockdown measures.

Unlike **optimal (sterilizing) vaccines** (which kill the virus and prevent infection and transmission) sub-optimal (non-sterilizing) vaccines do not adequately prevent infection or transmission. At best, they might lessen severity of illness.

Proponents of the alternative narrative would favor use of an optimal COVID vaccine, if an optimal vaccine were available and proven to be safe and effective. But an optimal COVID vaccine has not been available.

According to many experienced virologists/vaccinologists, a mass vaccination campaign using a sub-optimal (non-sterilizing) vaccine in the midst of a pandemic is a recipe for disaster. Why? Because, when a person who has been vaccinated with a sub-optimal vaccine is subsequently exposed to the virus, the vaccine does not prevent the virus from entering cells, replicating in those cells, and spreading to other people. And, When the virus replicates in the vaccinated person's cells, new mutations develop, and under the pressure of the mass vaccination campaign and the added pressure of lockdown measures, the mutated variants that will be successful will be those that have an ability to "escape" the vaccine-induced anti-spike protein antibody and are more transmissible. The vaccine-induced antibodies quickly become less effective, the new variant more easily enters cells, more easily replicates, tends to be more transmissible than its predecessors, and can become an overwhelmingly predominant variant in the community. And,

In addition to the concern that the COVID mass vaccination campaign will inevitably result in development of predominant variants with increased vaccine resistance and increased transmissibility, there is concern that the mass vaccination campaign might eventually generate a predominant variant that is intrinsically more virulent (deadly) than any of its predecessors---an intrinsically more virulent variant that could be harmful to everyone, including children, regardless of vaccination status. Even if increased intrinsic virulence does not occur, COVID illness may become more life-threatening because of vaccine-induced ADE [Antibody-dependent Enhancement].

There is also concern that the COVID vaccines may be undermining and disrupting our normal immune system---particularly our innate immunity, particularly in children.

Dr. Vanden Bossche, a leading proponent of the alternative narrative, disagrees that this is a "pandemic of the unvaccinated." On the contrary, he views it as a pandemic that has become prolonged and more dangerous because of the mass vaccination campaign. Furthermore, he worries that it is the vaccinated people who are becoming the most likely "spreaders" of the virus---because the vaccine allows the vaccine-resistant variant to enter their cells and replicate, while the vaccine might indirectly make them less symptomatic, even asymptomatic, which results in their possibly being unwitting asymptomatic spreaders.

Dr. Vanden Bossche thinks it is a huge mistake to continue the current COVID mass vaccination campaign. He strongly urges that we stop vaccinating before it is too late---before an even more transmissible and more virulent variant is generated (by mass vaccination), before ADE becomes more common, and before the immune systems of a higher and higher percentage of the population become compromised/hampered by the vaccines.

He emphasizes that the greatest contributors to herd immunity are those who are unvaccinated and develop naturally acquired sterilizing immunity. If everyone becomes vaccinated, there will be no one left to develop unfettered naturally acquired sterilizing immunity.

His admonition includes a plea to not start vaccinating people with a new vaccine that is directed against Omicron's mutated spike protein. Such a vaccine would be only transiently beneficial, if at all, and would soon become obsolete when an inevitable new vaccine-resistant strain appears. Furthermore, continued vaccination with a new, updated vaccine will delay restoration of natural immunity that he fears has been disrupted and harmed by COVID vaccines. And continued vaccination will further delay development of herd immunity.

The worst possible scenario would be the development of an extremely transmissible, more intrinsically virulent, vaccine-resistant strain that a fully vaccinated and ADE-prone population is unable to handle and that even unvaccinated children's immune systems might have difficulty controlling.

According to the alternative narrative, the total cumulative numbers of COVID hospitalizations, COVID ICU admissions, and COVID deaths during the COVID pandemic (from the beginning of the pandemic through January 2022) would have been lower if the pandemic had not been treated with the mass vaccination campaign and, instead, had been managed as described in Section 3.

As with other issues raised in this Open Letter, it would be immensely helpful to establish an **"Inclusive Independent International COVID Commission,"** consisting of independent international panels of fairly selected, eminent scientists who would be asked to respectfully, thoroughly, objectively, transparently, and publicly address the conflicting points of view on COVID vaccination, in an effort to resolve disagreements and arrive at consensus.

4. Michel Foucault on plague, discipline, and power

From *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by A. Sheridan, pp. 195-228. Vintage Books, 1995:

> This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead — all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. The plague is met by order; its function is to sort out every possible confusion: that of the disease, which is transmitted when bodies are mixed together; that of the evil, which is increased when fear and death overcome prohibitions. It lays down for each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death, his well-being, by means of an omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way even to the ultimate determination of the individual, of what characterizes him, of what belongs to him, of what happens to him. Against the plague, which is a mixture, discipline brings into play its power, which is one of analysis. A

> whole literary fiction of the festival grew up around the plague: suspended laws, lifted prohibitions, the frenzy of passing time, bodies mingling together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized, allowing a quite different truth to appear. But there was also a political dream of the plague, which was exactly its reverse: not the collective festival, but strict divisions; not laws transgressed, but the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power; not masks that were put on and taken off, but the assignment to each individual of his "true" name, his "true" place, his "true" body, his "true" disease. The plague as a form, at once real and imaginary, of disorder had as its medical and political correlative discipline. Behind the disciplinary mechanisms can be read the haunting memory of "contagions", of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder.
>
> If it is true that the leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion, which to a certain extent provided the model for and general form of the great Confinement, then the plague gave rise to disciplinary projects. Rather than the massive, binary division between one set of people and another, it called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power. The leper was caught up in a practice of rejection, of exile-enclosure; he was left to his doom in a mass among which it was useless to differentiate; those sick of the plague were caught up in a meticulous tactical partitioning in which individual differentiations were the constricting effects of a power that multiplied, articulated and subdivided itself; the great confinement on the one hand; the correct training on the other. The leper and his separation; the plague and its segmentations. The first is marked; the second analysed and distributed. The exile of the leper and the arrest of the plague do not bring with them the same political dream. The first is that of a pure community, the second that of a disciplined society. Two ways of exercising power over men, of controlling their relations, of separating out their dangerous mixtures. The plague-stricken town, traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies – this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city. The plague (envisaged as a possibility at least) is the trial in the course of which one may define ideally the exercise of disciplinary power. In order to make rights and laws function according to pure theory, the jurists place themselves in imagination in the state of nature; in order to see perfect disciplines functioning, rulers dreamt of the state of plague. Underlying disciplinary projects the image of the plague stands for all forms of confusion and disorder; just as the image of the leper, cut off from all human contact, underlies projects of exclusion.

Quoted here from "Coronavirus and philosophers" see this post also for contemporary commentary by Giorgio Agamben and Sergio Benvenuto, *European Journal of Psychoanalysis*, and "Six political philosophies in search of a virus: Critical perspectives on the coronavirus pandemic," Gerard Delanty,

Presentation Notes

Clarification: this topic is about two competing virtues each of which entails an imperative that is strictly incompatible with the one entailed by the other. And there is no viable resolution except by compromising one or the other or both. And the compromise is eternally unstable. The tension is always there but in ordinary times, the tension between them is buried and tolerable. In times of crisis or in emergencies, the tension can threaten to tear human communities apart. The lesson, if there is one, is to avoid emergencies – or at least the *perception* of them.

1. Socratic virtues

One is to be moved by the imperative *to seek truth* at any cost and the other is *not to undermine the community* that makes any virtue operative. Socrates embodies both in Plato's early dialogues, the *Apology* and the *Crito*:

Epistemic virtue – in the *Apology*, he pushes his luck and defends truth-seeking, to the point of courting and incurring a death sentence.

S*ocial/moral/political virtue* – in the *Crito*, without recanting any aspect of his performance in the *Apology*, he goes onto defend the authority that condemned him.

Truth is one thing. Piety or respect for the powers that *not only reign but are responsible* for the conditions that make your existence and character with its cultural and individualized trappings possible is another. Truth-seeking is a moral imperative. But it is not concerned to justify *impious* action at the cost of social cohesion and the respect for institutional authority. Socrates does not escape his execution even when every opportunity presents itself. That would show cowardice on his part. If he was so brave in championing the truth, he cannot now run from the consequences. This is how it is. These virtues are not compatible. Strategies that attempt to make them so, which are only too common: *to shape truth around a social virtue* so that we may claim our virtue and eat it, too, are understandable as animal adjustments in the interest of regulating cognitive dissonance which grates on our social nerves. But these are transparently non-rational.[54]

2. Elite versus lay hesitancy/skepticism

Stephen David John's distinction discussed in "Part 6 - Can vaccine hesitancy be rational?" is critical to understanding the imagined audience of this discussion. We will mostly be addressing the elite forms of hesitancy/skepticism and compliance/acceptance. The lay versions of hesitancy/skepticism describe vastly more people than the elite version (almost by definition). But elite hesitancy/skepticism arguably

54. Neither survival nor flourishing are epistemic values. They would have to be to say they are rational. The non-rational biosphere thrives without the need for articulable values or rational explanations.

affects institutional thinking and design and thus has deeper and more far-reaching consequences. (Besides, I assume, the people curious enough to attend this discussion lean more toward an elite rather than a lay orientation: you are not blind Trumpian "deplorables.")

The spectrum between lay and elite *hesitancy/skepticism* has a counterpart in a spectrum between lay and elite *compliance/acceptance*. The vast majority of the *lay* vaccine *hesitant* follow thought leaders or a consensus in their epistemic bubbles or echo chambers, but so do the vast majority of *lay* vaccine *compliant*. The *elite* among *both* the compliant *and* hesitant research and ask questions – the more elite, the more relentlessly. They agonize over decisions, sometimes regret them, and often remain unsettled. In fact, this *uneasiness* exactly characterizes what it means to be among the elite in either group.

3. Readings from:

- 2015 open letter in Johns Hopkins publication on what "**an abundance of caution**" can justify
- Johan Anderberg's article on the discrepancy between **public perception and the reality** of the Covid-19 pandemic

4. Definitions/usage of MDM:

We will sometimes use the term "misinformation" as short for all three: mis-, dis-, and mal- forms of information (or MDM, as CISA puts it). But there are important differences.

- To call out "mis-" information is a way of excusing when it is true its conveyor is *both* innocent and *not* culpable for their innocence.
- The "dis-" form of information appears to be a suspicious euphemism for a lie. "Suspicious" because what cause is being served by not just calling it a lie or deception?
- "Mal-" information has moral connotations that transcend both truth and deception: the implication is that it is *bad* to say such things, *regardless* of their truth value. They may threaten social cohesion or damage community "resilience" in the face of threat (as CISA suggests). "Social cohesion" and "resilience" are axiomatized as *indisputable* goods. They may preempt any and all other moral or social values.

5. Epistemic bubbles and echo chambers: which is better?

Neil Levy, for one, thinks echo chambers are better. They at least permit a bit of fresh air. Given that human communities aren't capable of living totally outside information enclosures of some sort, unprotected from or subject to the raw epistemic elements, if we must have our information filtered, the vigilant, home-turf defensiveness of a echo chamber-resident exposes them, like it or not, to the *possibility* of having a "near-truth" experience.

6. Emergencies and rights: what gives?

Rights-talk is rampant at this stage in the history of ideas. It wasn't that long ago that it was unintelligible. Some thinkers have always objected that a "right" is inappropriately grounded in the sanctity of the individual, whereas the proper moral ground is a community. Whatever the case may be as to its legitimacy, allegiance to such talk wanes when a state or state-like entity declares an emergency. Of what use is a right if it is only enforceable when it is *not* the community, whose duty (we are told) it is to protect it, wants to violate it? Supposedly, a right was conceived as an abstract tool for protecting the individually weaker from the collectively stronger. If the state or state-like entity declares a "rights-holiday" because of an emergent crisis, presenting a danger to the interests of the collectively stronger, how is this different from the situation in pre-rights times when power was wielded more nakedly. Rights-talk, then, was all along a bit of *disinformation*, not true, a grand fiction, but expedient to promulgate for those in a position to do so. A "right" was all along merely a tool to manipulate, valid only as long as it works for the ends of those entities with the necessary concentration of power to confer and retract it.